

COVID 19

THE NEW NORMAL

How to Survive a New World Order



Edited by
Dushyant & Osama Manzar

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INTRODUCTION

THE NEW NORMAL

how to survive a new world order

Internet and more specifically social media have, for the first time in human history, enabled that a substantial part of the debate and discourse around every single event is now recorded and stored for posterity. When an earthquake happens, people think about tweeting before they think about leaving the building. We all know the horrible side effects of social media. Hate news, fake news, the effect it has begun to have on our attention, our relationships, our society, and our democracy. But we forget that it has also done a fair bit of good. It has democratized access to information to a significant extent, hasn't it? A layman sitting in Uttar Pradesh can read a Facebook post or Twitter thread from an epidemiologist sitting in New York.

At least a section of the society can get live alerts from the World Health Organisation. Be that as it may, more often than not, the end result is that there is a lot of chaotic noise and very little calm reflection. There is a lot of ‘opinion’ but very little old school analysis. There is a lot of saying and very little listening. In such a time it has become more important than ever to listen to experts. To expand our attention horizons beyond 280 character. In this anthology, we have attempted to put together a cross-section of experts from the world of business, law, economics, internet governance, communication, journalism, public policy, and more. We have been able to persuade them to pen their thoughts on the key learnings we need to take away from the unprecedented crisis we find ourselves in.

Dr. Amir Ullah Khan goes straight to the heart of the matter and asks the most hotly debated if not most pressing question of our times- what will happen to democracy. How will Covid-19 affect democracy and elections? Will the global slide downward continue, or will there be a silver lining? Dr. Abu Saleh Shariff and Amit Sharma put forth a unique and equitable employment methodology. Employment generation was the #1 crisis before Covid-19 and one which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This methodology offers a specific and scientific way of creating employment.

Dr. Ameeta Mulla Wattal talks about the present and the future of our future-children and their education. She argues that both teaching and learning will have to be radically re-imagined and that technology is just one part of this process of re-imagining. Anriette Esterhuysen shares fascinating insights about the journey of global internet governance and the path ahead. In her essay, she has written something which gave us a lot of pause: “The shift from the preoccupation with the harmful use of the internet reflected in debates on the regulation of content and use, to widespread recognition, even a celebration, of its positive potential. Even legitimate concerns about pandemic-related misinformation do not overshadow the sense that we would be so much worse off without the internet.”

Arun Maira frames the challenge far more ambitiously than a mere shift and acclimatization to technology. He says that human aspirations will have to fundamentally change. At first glance, this may seem like too tall a hurdle to surmount but he leaves us in no doubt that this is the only path to take if humanity is to survive. While everyone is consumed with shifting to digital, Deepak Maheshwari

says that digital has to be taken to a workshop and overhauled first, or to put it in his words, ‘rebooted and retooled’.

Durga Raghunath has shared with us as a fascinating peek inside how Zomato identified and dealt with the challenges the pandemic presented and leveraged its strengths not only to save its business but also to help society fight better. Experiences of the kind she has shared will be taught in B-schools for years to come. Dr. Ganesh Natarajan makes a case for something as elusive as a vaccine for Covid-19 these days: optimism. He passionately argues that all isn’t lost and there are plenty of silver linings in these dark clouds.

Dr. Madanmohan Rao writes about something that even the World Health Organisation is repeatedly struggling with- communication in a crisis. He shares a valuable checklist to tick off if you want successfully and clearly communicate during a crisis. Mani Chander sheds light on a topic there has been little to no discussion on the risks that a complete shift to ‘work from home’ poses in terms of sexual harassment and the inadequate legal regime governing the same. Seema Chishti’s essay reminded us of Gandhi’s talisman. She argues that economic thought needs to center the welfare of the Migrant worker if we want to rebuild our economy/country/society. Seema Pathak takes us on a journey far away from our ivory towers into a panchayat in Bihar and gives us a reality check about the reach of digital and the work that needs to be done. Somen Mishra, like Ms. Raghunath gives us a peek into the changes that the glorious world of cinema is bringing about and it isn’t just about ‘watching from home’.

We have essentially written about the same concept and value but from different lenses. That value is justice.

We hope dear reader that this anthology will inform and educate your world view as much as it did ours. We hope it will help all of us prepare better for what we are faced with and what lies ahead.

Sincerely,

Dushyant & Osama Manzar



DUSHYANT

COMPUTERS WILL NOT SAVE THE COURTS

In the months following the ‘lockdown’ there has been a spurt of webinars discussing what it is that the judiciary will have to do in a post-Covid world; how technology can be used to get the process of administration of justice as close to ‘digital’ as possible.

Whether it is the judiciary or any other sector when we talk about adjusting with a ‘post-Covid’ world what we mean is that since Covid-19 has made physical human proximity, especially in large groups, fatal in the worst-case scenario and inconvenient in the best-case scenario, how do we carry on with equal efficiency without such gatherings. We naturally turn to technology and ‘digital’ for answers.

I must confess to mixed feelings whenever I come across webinars discussing the functioning of the judiciary in a post Covid world and the need to inject more technology and so on.

The Supreme Court is the custodian of the Constitution of India. The constitution of India guarantees some fundamental rights. Governments frequently violate and infringe these rights. The Supreme Court, once described as ‘the last refuge of the bewildered and the oppressed,’ has been mandated by the Constitution of India to stand between the vulnerable individual and the mammoth state and protect the vulnerable. It is an institution meant to act as a check on the executive and the legislature. When either acts in a way which is violative of the constitution, the Supreme Court steps in to say- not constitutional and thus not happening. Similarly, when the executive and the legislature are failing to do something that they should have done, the court steps in to ensure that such an act is done. For instance, on account of the government’s failure to pass a law penalizing sexual harassment at work place and providing a mechanism which would hear grievances pertaining to such harassment, the court stepped in and framed the Vishakha guidelines, which became the basis of an anti-sexual harassment law which was passed sometime after.

But the apex court has come a long way from those days. From the moment that the first pan- India lockdown was imposed, it seemed that the Supreme Court firmly ‘locked’ its doors to all who wanted to seek justice. The court ‘distanced’ itself from administration of justice and appeared to treat fundamental rights as a virus more dangerous than the novel coronavirus itself.

Let us try to think over the various and very egregious instances of injustice that splashed across our television channels newspapers and screens: i) millions of migrant workers walking hundreds and in some cases thousands of kilometers back to their home and many dying of fatigue or hunger in the process; ii) women giving birth in the middle of these journeys and continuing to walk; iii) extraordinary discrimination and propaganda against Muslims aggravating their misery; iv) an increase in police atrocities especially against the poor; police overturning the carts of vegetable vendors; v) doctors and health workers being thrown out of their homes by home owners; vi) health workers being denied protective equipment; inedible food being served at camps organized by the government; vii) the Karnataka government cancelling trains for workers reportedly at the behest of a

builder lobby and after much outrage reversing that decision; viii) videos of government officials extorting unreasonable sums from workers for train tickets when the trains finally started plying; ix) Uttar Pradesh government practically criminalizing the disease by coming out with a law which punishes its contagiousness!

Now let me share some observations of the Supreme Court: In a petition seeking payment of wages to lakhs of migrant worker, the court asked: “If they are being provided meals, then why do they need money for meals?”

It took Prashant Bhushan to remind the court that people needed money for things other than meals: “They don’t just need food in the shelter homes.... We need to give them money to send to their families back home.”

To a submission that the food being provided in some shelters was inedible, the court said:

“They (petitioners) are saying that in some shelters the food is inedible. That is not something the court can monitor. We are not experts. We do not intend to interfere with what the government is doing without knowing what it is all about.

“We do not plan to supplant the wisdom of the government with our wisdom. We are not experts in health or management. We will ask the government to create a helpline for complaints,”

Finally in this particular hearing, the court observed:

“We cannot take a better policy decision at this stage. We don’t want to interfere in government decisions for the next 10-15 days,”

Then, in an interview to a newspaper, the sitting Chief Justice of India said, “Executive with its three ‘Ms’ of money, men and material is better-suited to deal with Covid-19 crisis.”

But in the framework of our constitution, all arms of the state are supposed to ‘deal’ with every crisis. There is no crisis which only the judiciary deals with or only the legislature deals with. All institutions have to play their role in the daily functioning of the state.

The stance of the court kept evolving. From saying that it had no role to play, it moved to saying that actually the workers were at fault because they were just doing what they wanted to do, and no one could stop them. In one hearing, the

court observed: “How do you stop people who want to keep walking? Can anyone go and stop them? Impossible for anyone to stop them,”

When told about the incident where workers sleeping on a railway track were mowed down by a train, the court said: How can anyone stop this when they sleep on railway tracks?”

To every lawyer’s astonishment, the court also berated the lawyer who was raising this issue by saying: “Every advocate read incidents in the paper and become knowledgeable about every subject. Your knowledge is totally based on newspaper clippings and then you want this court to decide. Let the state decide. Why should this court decide or hear? We will give you special pass. Can you go and implement government orders?”

I said astonished because the Supreme Court has a glorious history of *Suo Moto* acting on newspaper clippings. Meanwhile, the Solicitor General, who in laymen terms is the lawyer of the government was supporting this approach and encouraging the court to stay on this path.

On 31st March, he said: “I have instructions to state that no one is now on the road. Anyone who was outside has been taken to the available shelters” He relied on this to also say that it was in fact the media which was creating unnecessary panic. Needless to state that this was a white lie, one that the Solicitor General ultimately suffered no consequences for. In another hearing, he said: “it is impossible to stop people who want to keep walking”. “Migrants must have patience to wait for their turn”

So, in summary the top court had been saying: not our job and we need to step aside and finally moved to saying what can we do even if we want to, migrants just want to walk. Meanwhile, in the same country, there were countless other courts who believed differently and did not think that all that was needed of them was to step out of the way so that the government could ‘deal’ with the situation.

The Madras High Court passed a ruling on the right to privacy of people infected with Covid-19. The Delhi High Court passed a judgment pertaining to the functioning of ration shops and the entitlement of those who did not have ration cards.

In one case, the Kerala High Court questioned the Central Government about why Aarogya Setu has been made mandatory and noted that most poor people didn't have smart phones even now. In a petition filed by a workers' union, the Bombay High Court has also demanded answers from Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation about the protective equipment – masks, sanitisers, etc., being given to workers. It also slammed the City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra for making gardeners work during lockdown without protective gear, calling the corporations' conduct "callous and inhumane". The Patna High Court sought from the state government district wise data of the quarantine centers, observing that 1/10th of India's population lives in Bihar.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court took the same approach and in one case observed:

"This Court notices that hundreds of migrant labours with their children and baggage are walking on the National Highways... If at this stage, this Court does not react and pass these orders, this Court would be falling in its role as a protector and alleviator of suffering. Their pain has to be alleviated at this stage."

Ironically, the court was taking cue from news reports. A report in LiveLaw.com states: "The bench took note of "disturbing news reports" about the plight of migrants. It referred to a report in "Eenadu" that in a period of 24 hours between 13.05.2020 and 14.05.2020, 1300 people have passed one check post on walk or with cycles. Another 1000 of them have gone in lorries and in other transport vehicles. The Court also referred to reports which indicated that a woman has given birth when she was walking from Nasik to Sathani on the road. Further, this report also indicated that two hours after the delivery, the woman started walking and continued to walk for 150 kms. The National Human Rights Commission has taken note of this. Reports also indicated that ambulances are charging Rs.8,000/- in Mumbai even for moving a small distance."

The Andhra Pradesh High Court issued a slew of directions, making it amply evident how much a court can do and ought to do in the situation. I quote from the LiveLaw report:

"Particularly, with regard to the walking migrants, the court has directed that: Adequate arrangements for food should be made and the same should be distributed to the migrant labour, who are walking on the National Highway;

Outpost centres that have been established by the State should be stocked with good drinking water, oral dehydration salts and glucose packets which should be supplied to the migrant labour, who are walking;

Since a large number of women are walking in the heat, temporary toilets in a hygienic condition should be provided, assuring the privacy of the women. Further, Sanitary pad dispensing machines should be organized at every alternate centre, at least;

Those who are facing difficulty while walking should be transported in patrol vehicles of NHAI and Police Department, to the nearest shelter. Efforts should also be made to convince the migrant labour to stop walking and to take the transportation being provided by the State Government;

All the Police and Revenue authorities should be made aware of all the centres/food counters and they should guide the migrant workers, who are walking, towards the nearest of such centres;

Pamphlets should be printed in Hindi and Telugu informing the migrant labour, who are walking on the Highways of the location of these shelters and giving them a list of the phone numbers, which they can contact in case of emergencies.

In addition to the above, the court has directed that:
Adequate police personnel should be posted at the shelters being maintained for migrants, to ensure that social distancing and discipline is maintained.

Trained paramedical volunteers and/or doctors should be posted at every centre, with a dedicated mobile line and an ambulance on standby to attend to any sun-stroke victim or for other such medical emergencies. Ambulances on call should be available to assist the migrant workers and to transport them to the nearest hospitals or medical centres for immediate medical assistance, at the cost of the State.

The District collector of each District and the Superintendent of Police should appoint a Nodal Officer of a senior rank (Tahsildar/DSP etc.,) from the Revenue Department and the Police Department to look into and supervise each of the shelters etc., and their activities within. One Tahsildar and DSP should be looking into each of the shelters.

The services of the District Legal Services Authority may also be taken in case of shortage of staff for rendering any services. Similarly, the services of Para Legal volunteers, NSS, NCC, Bharath Scouts and Guides, Red-cross, Lions Clubs, Rotary Club and such other organisations should also be taken in order to man these shelters and to ensure that food, medical help etc., reach the migrant labour. The Nodal Officers shall have to coordinate all the activities of the shelter.

The High Courts in Bihar, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra and many other states came to the aid of the workers at the same time that the Supreme Court was saying that courts have no role to play. All this time, public opinion kept turning against the top court having distanced itself, newspaper editorial after newspaper editorial criticized the approach of the court, retired Supreme Court judges and senior advocates expressed anguish. Finally, the apex court had no option but to do something and nearly two months after the lockdown had been imposed, it initiated Suo moto proceedings.

In an ocean of conversation about digital, one cannot help but keep thinking of the clampdown on internet that happened in Kashmir and how even now, the people living there are only able to use 2g services. I see tweets from anguished teachers and parents on social media about how kids in Kashmir have to wait for hours to download a simple pdf. If you're someone who thinks that this is ok because anything is ok as far as Kashmir is concerned, please visit <https://internet-shutdowns.in> where you will see that internet is being shut down across India at the slightest pretext and more often than not illegally. India is not called the internet shutdown capital of the world for nothing. It is the country which sees the maximum internet shutdowns across the world. 67% of the world's internet shutdowns happen in India¹. Shutdowns which are violative of the Constitution of India and shutdowns which the Supreme Court can do a lot more to stop and regulate but is not doing.

How can wide ranging plans for digital integration be made in such a country?

All this isn't just a rant from a bleeding-heart liberal but has very real consequences for business. Business will hardly be content with shifting to digital when digital itself is not guaranteed.

The crisis that plagues the top court today is not the one posed by Covid-19. It is the one exposed by Covid-19- that even in extraordinary situations the top court

is deferring to the executive. It now seems a pale shadow of its former self, a mere extension of the executive. Therefore, the solution will not come from more internet in courts or more computers. It isn't lack of computers which prevented the top court from coming to the rescue of migrants in time.

What is then the solution? The solution is for individuals and organizations to understand what their relationship with the top court is. Indians in any part of their life are not at the mercy of the top court. We gave to ourselves the constitution of India and the constitution of India has mandated that the court protect our rights. The court belongs to us and is answerable to us. Believe me, the court also cares about public opinion. The solution then is that in the same way that individuals and organizations stepped forward to help or as some would say to do their duty in the time of this pandemic, we will also have to step forward to educate ourselves and each other about the constitution of India and the rights we, the people granted to ourselves through it. I see an uber advertisement these days which says that if one rider stays hygienic, she will protect the next rider also. It is the same for legal education also. If one person becomes more aware, he or she is more likely to protect those around her also. This is a crisis where the cure and the vaccine are in front of us. We just need to strengthen our self and then help others vaccinate too. Because as with the Covid-19 pandemic, even in this pandemic, we are only as safe as the weakest person in our city/state//nation. If even one person remains unwell, the disease will take us any day.



MANI CHANDER

WORK FROM HOME AND THE CHALLENGE OF ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN

The pandemic has drastically changed the way we live and work. It has accelerated the onset of new trends at work and forced businesses across the spectrum to adopt work-from-home measures. As the fight against the virus continues, this shift to remote working is here to stay.

Many have argued that the shift to a virtual workplace is a silver lining for female workers as it will allow increased flexibility and productivity. However, this may not be entirely true in a patriarchal country like India, where women are expected to shoulder disproportionately higher domestic burden. As the lockdown has cut off most informal support systems for women, they now have to spend a

substantial part of their time cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their children besides having to work-from-home. For many, staying at home has also resulted in increased friction in households, which is evident from the unprecedented surge in domestic and intimate partner violence.¹

Another tremendous difficulty women continue to face is that of sexual harassment. While remote working may reduce forms of violence and harassment that arise in the traditional workplace, it has increased the risk of online harassment. An alarming 2017 survey² conducted by Norton by Symantec, a reputed cybersecurity firm, found that the phenomenon of online harassment is rampant in the country. It revealed that eight out of ten people in India experienced some form of online harassment, and 41% of women faced sexual harassment on the internet.

According to a recent survey³ by Truecaller on “Understanding the Impact of Harassment Calls & SMS for Women in India”, one out of five Indian women received a call or text message with sexually inappropriate content. It also found that a staggering 8 out of 10 women in India have faced harassment via calls or messages. In all probability, with higher internet penetration and more women working from home, these numbers are likely to shoot up substantially going forward.

While some may argue that online sexual harassment is innocuous, such technology-facilitated abuse is worrisome. It is likely to have significant professional, psychological, social, reputational, and financial harm to women who are already disadvantaged by lower pay grades and added domestic responsibilities. Research⁴ has also suggested that women subjected to online harassment are more prone to depression, anxiety and panic attacks, many of whom experience disrupted sleeping patterns, and some even feel that it threatens their careers.

Without question, the repercussions could be severe and long-lasting. They can hinder women’s ability to use technology freely and with confidence. Any gains made over the years to bridge the gender digital divide are likely to be undone. Therefore, as we make the shift to virtual workplaces, it is imperative that we examine the existing legislation to prevent online sexual harassment of women. It is also crucial to ensure that such legislation is not diluted due to the ongoing pandemic.

The Law of Sexual Harassment at ‘Virtual’ Workplace

It is often assumed that sexual harassment can only take place within the confines of a traditional physical office space. However, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (“PoSH Act”) contemplates the concept of an “extended workplace.” Therefore, sexual harassment which takes place at an extension of a place of work, including an employee’s home, is also regulated by the PoSH Act. Sub-clauses (v) and (vi) of Section 2(o) of the Act make it amply clear that “any place visited by the employee arising out of or during the course employment” or “a dwelling place or a house” can be workplaces for the purposes of the Act.

As many women have turned to remote working, the boundaries between their work and personal lives are blurred. Now, more than ever, women are finding themselves glued to their laptops round the clock. With no fixed working hours and lack of time sovereignty, working women are at greater risk of being subjected to online sexual harassment.

Online sexual harassment can take various forms ranging from mild sexual advances to rape threats. It may include but is not limited to inappropriate texts, repeated and unnecessary phone or video call requests at odd hours, and offensive emails containing lewd jokes or sexually colored remarks by male counterparts or employers. Non-verbal and implicit gestures such as dressing inappropriately or making obscene gestures during video calls may also amount to sexual harassment. While some antagonists may choose to term these as mild, harmless, casual, or even friendly gestures, for women undergoing harassment, they have significant ramifications.

Women who refuse to respond to such emails, calls, or texts and oppose such behaviour, are likely to face retaliation or lose their jobs. In many cases, this could result in more serious forms of sexual harassment such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, blackmailing, and threats of sexual or physical violence. Such behaviour towards women often leads to a toxic and hostile work environment that is explicitly punishable under the Act.

The Hon’ble High Court of Delhi, in the case of *Jahid Ali vs. Union of India & Ors.*,⁵ observed that sexually coloured messages over mobile phones would amount to sexual harassment of a woman under the PoSH Act. Highlighting that such in-

cidents ought to be viewed from the perspective of a woman's subjective experience, the Court held that the standard applied to such cases is not that of a 'reasonable man', but of a 'reasonable woman'. Further, the Court also remarked on the seriousness of the acts by emphasizing that they could not be left unheeded as innocent flirtation or mistakes. Similarly, in *Ajay Tiwari vs. University Of Delhi And Ors.*,⁶ the Hon'ble Delhi High Court held that messages and voice calls having sexual overtones would attract the charge of sexual harassment.

It is noteworthy that online sexual harassment may also attract penal provisions of other acts such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and Indian Penal Code, 1860. The Hon'ble High Court of Kerala in *Majeesh K. Mathew vs. State of Kerala*⁷, while considering charges under the said acts, held that sexually explicit comments on social media against a woman amount to online sexual harassment. The Court went so far as to explicitly call out online baiting and observed that the freedom offered by social media cannot be exploited by branding a woman as sexually promiscuous.

Challenges & Dilution of the PoSH Act Amidst COVID-19

The lockdown and sudden shift to remote working have posed many challenges to the proper implementation of the PoSH Act. In many ways, it has diluted the already ill-implemented laws of sexual harassment at workplace. Various unique issues have emerged, which could have potentially been avoided if our laws were clear and comprehensive.

Reporting & Internal Committees

Many women refrain from reporting online sexual harassment due to the fear of losing their jobs amidst lockdown. Under the current circumstances, even those who gather the courage to report are typically left unattended as HR personnel and businesses are busy with their efforts to recoup massive financial losses.

The PoSH Act makes it mandatory for all workplaces to have in place comprehensive policies and Internal Committees ("ICs") to inquire into workplace sexual harassment. Under the veil of the pandemic, organisations are increasingly disregarding their obligations of constituting and ensuring the functioning of ICs. These are tasks that could easily be done online. However, in many cases organisations have refrained from constituting ICs during the lockdown. Where ICs have been constituted, they are either defunct or not in compliance with the provisions of the Act.

Despite having the ability to hold inquiries through video conferencing, many have reportedly brought inquiries to a complete standstill while also flouting the mandate to complete inquiries within 90 days. Recently, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has allowed board meetings to be held through video conferencing or other audio-visual means. The Hon'ble Supreme Court too has encouraged the use of video conferencing. However, organisations have blatantly misused the lockdown to halt proceedings, which could have been conveniently conducted. In some cases, respondents have also requested ICs to put proceedings on hold in lieu of the lockdown restrictions. This leaves ICs in a conundrum as they are unable to complete inquiries in a timely manner.

Problems in Online Inquiries

It is possible, however, that some organisations may also be facing genuine challenges in holding inquiries online. The PoSH law being fairly nascent remains ambiguous on many aspects. This has thrown pending workplace sexual harassment inquiries into uncertainty.

For instance, while there is no bar to holding cross examinations through video-conferencing, there are logistical issues in doing so. As ICs are granted the powers of a civil court, they cannot breach the basic principles of civil procedure. Online cross-examinations could allow room for such breach. A person deposing may have lawyers prompting them through the process, which is otherwise prohibited by law.

Holding inquiries through video-conferencing could also potentially lead to breach of confidentiality and privacy. Participants of inquiries may be uncomfortable holding conversations about such sensitive matters while they are in the confines of their homes. Besides, being around family during such calls could lead to unsolicited disruptions and distractions.

Another practical problem with holding inquiries online is that some participants, including members of the IC may not have the technological know-how to operate apps used for such proceedings. This may interrupt the proceedings or lead to breach of confidentiality, vitiating the entire inquiry. Even in cases where no such technological issues exist, complainants or respondents may object and refuse to attend due to the fear that their privacy may be compromised. In such a scenario, the proceedings will inevitably be prolonged or put on hold as the Act requires ensuring mental health and comfort to both parties.

Local Committees & the Role of State Governments

In cases where an organisation has less than ten employees, the Act allows working women, whether in the organised or unorganised sector, to report sexual harassment to Local Committees (“LCs”). These committees also come into play when a complaint is directly against an employer. As per the Act, each district is mandated to have one LC, which would have the jurisdiction to hear complaints of workplace sexual harassment in the district.

State Governments are empowered to appoint a District Officer for each district in a state who is responsible for the appointment of members of LCs. Unfortunately, many districts have not constituted LCs in accordance with the Act. Even where they are constituted, they lack technological competence to deal with complaints and conduct inquiries online. During the lockdown, many aggrieved women who reportedly wrote to LCs received no response from the authorities whatsoever. In cases where LCs responded, little to no action was taken due to shifted priorities.

All things considered, the purpose of the PoSH Act is largely defeated due to technological challenges and legislative inadequacies.

Way forward

Harassment of women is as real online as it is offline. In the times to come, we are likely to continue working virtually, and these issues are bound to become more apparent as the number of online sexual harassment cases increase. Sexual harassment has a lasting impact on the psychological health of women, which could further wreck their careers. Women’s participation in the workforce is already abysmal and is likely to worsen post-pandemic. It is, therefore, imperative that women’s employment issues are given priority in our recovery efforts.

The Central Government should focus on addressing the glaring gaps in the existing legislation going forward. Ambiguities ought to be removed, keeping in view the new reality of a virtual workplace. State governments must take it upon themselves to ensure that LCs are constituted in every district and that members of LCs are technologically trained to meet the needs of an evolving online world. Inquiries should be held online and not delayed on the pretext of lockdown restrictions.

Organisations should adopt guidelines and rules of conduct that specifically address remote-working and inculcate a culture of sensitivity towards women. Managements must make efforts to incorporate such rules of conduct in sexual harassment policies. Moreover, organisations should amend their service rules to enable cross-examinations and holding of inquiries online. So far as possible, women should be given flexibility to choose their working hours so that they are able to take care of other responsibilities without feeling overburdened. Organisations must also invest in training employees so that they are wary of boundaries they need to maintain while working remotely.

Sexual harassment at workplace, even if it is online, is a gross violation of a woman's right to dignity, life, and liberty. Not only does it impede a woman's ability to deliver in today's competitive world, it has serious implications for our society. Government and private players must make coordinated efforts to ensure that women are able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by remote working, rather than being disadvantaged because of it. As we continue to face peculiar challenges posed by the pandemic, we must endeavour to bring our laws and use of technology in line with the reality of an ever-evolving virtual workplace.

¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/love-sex/domestic-violence-cases-in-india-on-the-rise-during-lockdown-says-report/articleshow/75801752.cms>

² <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/8-out-of-10-indians-have-faced-online-harassment/article19798215.ece>

³ <https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/the+mobile+indian+english-epaper-mblinden/one+out+of+five+women+in+india+receive+sexual+and+inappropriate+calls+truecaller-newsid-n169939808>

⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/more-quarter-uk-women-experiencing-online-abuse-and-harassment-recv-threats>

⁵ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/179353262/>

⁶ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/166645308/>

⁷ <https://www.legitquest.com/case/majeesh-k-mathew-v-state-of-kerala-through-inspector-of-police-pala-represented-by-the-public/104C97>



SEEMA CHISHTI

WE NEED TO STOP BEING ECONOMICAL WITH THE TRUTHS ABOUT OUR ECONOMY

It was a Hungarian doctor, Ignaz Semmelweis, who, in 1847, had a small but hugely effective lesson to offer. Semmelweis demonstrated that it was hand washing with chlorinated lime solution before a surgery that stood between life and death. He was laughed at derisively and eventually ended his life in a mental asylum. But as far as fighting infections go, Semmelweis is who we have to thank for, even as we tackle 2020 and the Coronavirus.

As the virus and its effect have tightened its iron claws simultaneously on the world, its impact would be similarly widespread, leaving no aspect of existence uncovered. In terms of the Indian experience, the sudden onset of disease - and

our response revealed the most basic of home truths. The way forward, whether we like it or not, will be deeply colored by the dye that jumped out of the can and is now everywhere to be seen.

As the 1990s threw India open, the resultant scramble was economic, social, technological, and all-pervasive. The sharp engine of disruption-opening markets got rendered many unemployed and uncertain in the new world. But it also heralded entry points for new things to emerge, new energy which a rapidly growing young India embraced.

India's surge from a country more defined by Satyajit Ray's films and its own socialistic non-alignment was now more about its brusque but vibrant burst on the world stage. The economic tide lifted many boats, no doubt unequally. Yet, the dream that was fired by the understanding that education and the pursuit of skills would allow one to break the poverty trap had severe social consequences too. The Market, the new Media, with Mandal and the Mandir movement too that happened to take off at the same time, churned the country that impacted the headline most dramatically.

The early twenty-first century seemed tumultuous, and there was hope and despair in how the new economic environment played out. Like with every fact in India, there was an equal and opposite compelling truth.

So, it was clear that inequality was the one indicator that had taken off. The Oxfam report,¹ Thomas Piketty's work, all showed how unequal India was, with its new billionaires cornering more than 4/5ths of India's wealth. The Oxfam Inequality Report showed that the top one percent took 73% of India's wealth. It would take 941 years for a minimum wage worker in rural India to earn what the top paid executive at a leading Indian garment company earns in a year.

The 2019 global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) finally put a number to those lifted out of poverty, told of the successes that had been achieved - "there were 271 million fewer people in poverty in 2016 than in 2006", so the big battle against poverty in the world was led by India in this decade, even if the measurement of poverty was fraught with bitter debates.²

One thing was clear though, whatever India got to boast of, see as success, was possible due to jugaad or the ability to innovate one's way out of one's economic circumstances. This was a theme underlined somewhat violently by Slumdog Millionaire, of India breaking the poverty frame, which put it in the same bracket as its poorer neighbors. The seat at the economic high-table, with India offering a stable and big market and the promise of an open environment, meant the good times for India.

"Why did India grow at all" was a question asked sharply by Nobel laureate Prof Abhijit Banerjee in a lecture at Brown University. The answer as he and other economists testify is sectors like construction, real estate, and some other services, that allowed the jump to a little more prosperity, despite feeble manufacturing and a faltering agrarian economy. So, the entire shine that was the prize India thought it had won was premised on the daily wager, the 'dihaadi' model, centered around the informal economy, which soon became 93% of the total workforce.

The edifice of the Indian promise became the dihaadi worker and the environment that allowed people to eke out a meager living, skating on the margins of starvation, but somehow avoiding it, escaping the specter of a sub-Saharan existence, when Kalahandi could no longer be used to describe the Indian situation.

What Covid-19 and the four-hour notice Lockdown did was to attack the most vulnerable, numerous, and fragile of the links in the chain that made the India story. So even as those more prosperous - numerous to the rest of the world given our numbers, yet just 1% of India - hunkered down in their homes and put out recipes, the root of our prosperity, 'growth' and 'development' started a long and arduous journey back to their states of origin.

An NGO, 'Jan Sahas', was quick on the ball, with data immediately after the lockdown, a survey of 3,196 migrant construction workers whose livelihood had been disrupted, and it conveyed a sorry state. The survey confirmed the effect of the lockdown "92.5% of laborers who had already lost work ranging from one week to three weeks." It concluded from its telephonic survey of workers from North and Central India: first, that "42 percent of the workers mentioned that they had no ration left even for the day, let alone for the duration of the lockdown". The survey also found that if the lockdown continued beyond three weeks,

two-thirds of the laborers would be unable to manage their household expenses beyond seven days.³

It was the World Bank, which in 2017 updated its Poverty benchmark, up from \$1.9 per day to \$3.2 per day in a “lower-middle-income country” like India or Egypt.⁴ The majority of India, an overwhelming majority, is somehow or was somehow, before the body-blow of the lockdown, making it in just the zone between the two ‘lines’. A push downwards, with no prospects, is just another way of seeing and stating what is an evident truth to anybody who cares to look.

The look-ahead must now begin to mean that any discussion about the economy is about the well-being and prosperity of each citizen. The investment of the elite and the middle-classes, who occupy an inordinately high proportion of the noise-makers inputting into policy, must be towards the most vulnerable amongst us. If not for the big moral reason of empathy, then for common-sense reasons and a sense that we all hang together. ‘Social distancing’ has only revealed how connected we are to those we don’t live with, and how the well-being of each and every one of us has a deep and enduring impact on all of us.

The outlook for the year ahead is bleak in India. The economy was broken at its most vulnerable and most important points (both being the same) ever since the demonetization shock in 2016. Things were already sliding down dangerously after 2019, as is clear with reports of fudged data, the government not wanting to part with statistics of either unemployment or farm suicides. But the Covid shut-down has been the last straw and pushed everything more dramatically downhill. Cascading Unemployment figures are now a flood, with 14 crores, as per the Centre for Monitoring of the Indian Economy (CMIE), putting unemployment at a whopping 26%, with no real chance of things bouncing back on their own.⁵

All other indicators, like Manufacturing, Industry, Capex, Business confidence, were anyway down, and despite the rejigged GDP, the outlook has been pegged by Goldman Sachs at -1.4% this first quarter. Various other estimates share a grim picture. The way out cannot mean more austerity and cutbacks in ‘welfare’.

Economists in touch with the latest pre-Covid NSSO Survey were despairing about the fall in Consumption Expenditure witnessed for the first time in four decades, as the average amount of money spent by a person in a month fell by 3.7

percent to Rs 1,446 in 2017-18 from Rs 1,501 in 2011-12. This, after adjustment for Inflation.⁶

So Covid to add to these woes must only render one lesson for India, which we would do well to heed. It is the investment in each of our people that our collective prosperity would hang on.

Those arguing for balancing the budget or insisting that responsibility to the 'fiscal' would be paramount would be missing both the wood and the trees. It would also mean making the same mistake that the West did after the Great Recession of 2008, which was to give a stimulus but to those on top of the pyramid.

India, in the curious way that its supply and demand is intertwined - with the same dihaadi person producing the supply and being the demand that shores up domestic demand, making the wheels of industry chug on - it is vital to render the citizen healthy and economically secure.

The Covid Crisis must push us to embrace a sustainable principle of economics and ecology that puts the lives of all as the top priority.

So, as a start, just investing in community-wise, district-wise local health care, primary, secondary, and tertiary, would give many jobs and generate wealth along with health. Primary healthcare is more labor-intensive than we would wish to imagine, which perhaps illustrates why a certain kind of healthcare was able to tackle Covid and one dependent on big, mega hospitals alone, could not.

That it took a disaster like Covid with heart-rending scenes of millions driven out of their homes and walking back to their villages to suddenly reveal the invisible poor, or reveal the dependency and the Lego of our economic and shared lives is tragic, but it may well be worth it if India was to learn the value of each of its vastly underpaid but invaluable builders - its carpenters, tailors, rickshaw waalas, road-sign painters, cobblers, drapers, plumbers, beldaars, tile-makers, masons, bhishtis, security officers, fishermen, butchers, vegetable vendors, wholesale shopkeepers, transporters, delivery-boys, and auto-rickshaw drivers.

To come back to Ignaz Semmelweis, who just gave us one mantra - hand washing - if there is the one truth that must emerge from the Covid disaster for India, it

must mean us confronting and being forthright about the several camels in the tent, the essential truth of our economy and what it rests on. Most importantly, it must mean we are able to build on it, for it is on each Indian's shoulders that the richest Indian's prosperity rests on, in the most direct of ways.

It is an uncertain future, no doubt, and India's is a unique case, different from the West, East Asia, China, or Africa. There is only one certainty, and that is there is no going back to the past - if the future is new, let's reimagine it better than what it was before Covid.

¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/india-extreme-inequality-numbers>

² <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2019-MPI>

³ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/apr/06/most-migrant-workers-unaware-of-lockdown-relief-measures-survey-2126287.html>

⁴ <https://www.businessamlive.com/world-bank-releases-new-benchmarks-poverty-set-3-2-day-threshold-nigerians/>

⁵ <https://unemploymentinindia.cmie.com>

⁶ <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/business-news-first-time-in-four-decades-consumer-spending-in-india-falls-by-37-report/342379>



ANRIETTE ESTERHUYSEN

REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

The first global Internet Governance Forum (IGF), an outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society, took place in Athens in 2006. Since then, it has taken place every year: twice in Africa, five times in Asia¹, four times in Europe, and three times in Latin America. Since 2008, regional and later national IGFs emerged all over the world, followed by related youth initiatives. Collectively these are referred to as NRIs (National Regional and Youth IGF initiatives). The IGF model also includes intersessional “modalities”: self-organized dynamic coalitions and Best Practice Forums that focus on specific policy problems and solutions. Over time, the IGF as evolved to be greater than the sum of its parts. It consists of a vast and diverse mix of individuals and institu-

tions who participate in IGF processes to learn, solve problems, express concerns, build partnerships, and shape policy. What they have in common is that in one way or another, they care about the internet.

The 2020 IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG)², the group that organizes the annual Forum, started its work soon after the conclusion of a very successful meeting³ held in Berlin last November. By the end of 2019, the Berlin IGF messages⁴ were shared; eight new MAG members were inducted, and a call for feedback on the 2019 event and input on plans for 2020 was circulated. By the time the first face-to-face open consultation and MAG meeting took place in Geneva, from 14 to 16 January 2020, input from the IGF community⁵ had affirmed widespread support for the simpler thematic structure, which formed the basis for the Berlin programme. Based on this feedback, the MAG constructed a provisional thematic framework and presented it to the IGF community for comment and validation⁶ in late January.

Little did we know at the time of the January 2020 MAG meeting that the world would change so dramatically in a matter of weeks. The impact of the pandemic has been profound. People's personal and work lives have changed dramatically. Inequality – between and within countries - has shaped how people experience the pandemic. Those already impacted by social inequality are most affected, particularly people who have lost their jobs, or for whom social distance is simply not possible, because of high-density living conditions. Access to the internet is more of a divider than it has ever been. And a connection to the internet and relevant technology has affected access to education. Almost everywhere, poorer people in affected countries have suffered more and died in larger numbers.

Inequalities between countries have played out in less predictable ways, at least in the short term. For example, Vietnam, a country with a relatively low GDP per capita⁷ of USD 2,566.6 (2018), has weathered the COVID-19 crisis effectively. Vietnam is an authoritarian regime and has a poor human rights record, but in this instance, effective and transparent communication related to the pandemic earned public trust, and therefore cooperation, early on. Among wealthier countries, not all have managed well, Italy, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom being examples. Both South Korea and Germany, even though their GDP per capacity is far lower than that of the US, have done particularly well in

containing the virus. Public trust, people-centered policy and planning, and readily available public health services are clearly more important indicators of resilience than economic wealth. In fact, the pandemic and its impacts have clearly demonstrated the limitations of indicators such as growth in GDP. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index⁸ provides a more reliable measure of the kind of resilience needed in this kind of crisis. For the IGF, this suggests that deeper engagement with social and institutional development is needed in order to generate the kind of internet-policy related debate that can contribute to longer-term resilience and sustainable development.

The internet and its power as a platform for connecting people in positive ways, for remote work, entertainment, learning, and distribution of essential information has stood out more vividly in the last few months than ever before. What this means for internet governance globally and locally needs to be explored in the coming months. Worth considering, particularly for the many people and institutions that participate in the various IGFs, are the following shifts:

The shift from the preoccupation with the harmful use of the internet reflected in debates on regulation of content and use, to a widespread recognition, even a celebration, of its positive potential. Even legitimate concerns about pandemic-related misinformation do not overshadow the sense that we would be so much worse off without the internet. This does not mean that internet governance should not address misinformation, but it does create common ground for collaborative work on harnessing the internet's potential for good and ensuring its availability to all people as a global public resource.

The shift, dangerous in my view, to greater tolerance for content regulation as a response to misinformation. This puts freedom of expression and access to information at risk in the short and longer-term. Misinformation is ultimately better addressed through transparency, regular and clear sharing of information on the state of the pandemic, and of efforts to fight against it than by legislation that restricts or criminalizes content. In fact, the restriction of misinformation does not stop it from going viral, it can, however, contribute to its spread. An example is the trailer of the film "Plandemic" which contains COVID-19 related claims which are potentially dangerous. By the time Facebook removed it, it had been shared more than 1 million times.⁹ The removal of the film became a part of the conspiracy theory narrative, cited by supporters as further evidence of the scientist whose

claims the film is based on, being a victim. Not only does pandemic-related content regulation risk stifling freedom of expression, (e.g., when governments have media reports criticising their response to the virus removed), it does not stop it from spreading.

The shift in how people are thinking about internet access and affordability; and responsibility for ensuring it. When distance education and remote work are becoming the norm, when football matches take place with empty stands but are live-streamed, access to the internet is the connective tissue that enables social, cultural, and economic life to continue. Digital exclusion has always been linked to social exclusion, but never before as starkly as now. The importance of access to the internet is no longer the preoccupation of ICT ministries in developing countries; all government departments realize how vital it is. The notion that access can be left to market forces rings empty when you consider that millions of scholars might miss out on an entire academic year due to lack of access. The pandemic has created the opportunity for the necessary public sector leadership, private sector support, and enabling regulation and financing to empower the unconnected to connect themselves through community networks.

Leading from these shifts, I believe that this crisis has created a moment where agreement can be built on how governance can protect and consolidate the internet as being both “multistakeholder” and a global public good. For the Internet Governance Forum, this raises the question of whether it can fulfill its promise to be the platform that leads to the development of human rights-based, public interest oriented norms, and principles for global internet policy and regulation. The IGF did start taking on this challenge through many workshops and main sessions on the topic; its relationship with the NETmundial and its principles on internet governance;¹⁰ as well as through other sets of principles developed by institutions and networks that are part of the IGF community, such as the UN-ESCO R-O-A-M principles and the Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace’s norm to protect the public core of the internet.¹¹ But, as the pressure generated during the build-up to the IANA transition¹² ceased with its completion in 2016, so did efforts to arrive at globally-agreed principles for internet governance. Now is the time to restart the process of developing agreed principles for internet governance.

These are not new questions for internet governance actors, nor are they the only pertinent issues. But the current context could facilitate more effective engagement with them. The IGF2013 in Bali, held shortly after the Snowden revelations of mass online surveillance, paved the way for the IGF to take internet-related human rights concerns more fully on board. The COVID-19 pandemic could potentially help achieve a concrete agreement that the internet is an essential public resource and galvanize concerted cooperation to ensure universal access.

Other issues that internet governance processes should consider include contract tracing using people's mobile phones, which puts the right to privacy at risk. Another is the massively increased use of large social media platforms during the pandemic, which has further consolidated the dominance of a few large global internet companies, making it even harder to build diverse and competitive internet industries in developing countries.

In closing, I want to recognise and thank the many people and institutions who have been keeping the internet up and running during the last few months. I would like to call on all of us who are part of the broader internet governance community to applaud the system administrators, the engineers, those who assign internet domain names and numbers, who provide user support, who look after internet exchange points, who check cables and wires, and servers. There are millions of them and they are working harder than ever as more and more of our daily interactions and functions take place online. Without them the world as it is today during this time of crisis would be a much, much worse place.

¹The Istanbul IGF is counted as having taken place in Asia, even though Istanbul the city is very much part of both Europe and Asia.

² <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/mag-2020-members>

³ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2019>

⁴ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/berlin-igf-messages>

⁵ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/9615/1948

⁶ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2020-call-for-validation-of-the-matic-tracks>

⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

⁸ <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/technology/plandemic-movie-youtube-face-book-coronavirus.html>

¹⁰ <http://netmundial.br/netmundial-multistakeholder-statement/>

¹¹ R O A M = Rights – Openness – Access – Multistakeholder. Read more at <https://en.unesco.org/internet-universality-indicators/background>

¹ The IANA stewardship transition was the final step in a nearly two-decades long process of shifting oversight by the U.S. Department of Commerce over the internet domain name system to ICANN which is incorporated as a not-for-profit nongovernmental entity.



ANSHU GUPTA

THE SEARCH FOR A VACCINE AGAINST INDIFFERENCE

Let us begin with some incontrovertible facts. Owing to a health crisis, a nationwide lockdown was imposed at four hours' notice. Millions of people walked in front of houses large and small as well as private and government offices large and small. They did not stop to knock at a single one of these doors to ask for water or food leave alone shelter. There was no mass looting of the unguarded valuables in countless showrooms and offices.

The number of citizens who did come out to help was not even remotely proportionate to the scale of the tragedy. So most of us sat comfortably in our homes while a human tragedy of a mammoth proportion played itself out not only on

our television sets, social media and newspapers but also right outside our gates. When via the lockdown the government announced the entry of the pandemic in India, I thought to myself that here was a crisis which would truly change for the better how India and Indians functioned. I was wrong. The people who walked hundreds and, in some cases, even over a thousand kilometers were wiser. The biggest proof of their being wiser is the fact that they did not knock at any of our doors. They knew what the response would have been.

I was sharing these thoughts with someone who offered the theory that actually people did not turn out because they were worried about getting infected with the virus. It is tempting to believe this, isn't it? It was only mortal fear, which was holding us back. I would have believed this if only it wasn't an obvious falsehood. Coronavirus was not holding us back from responding to the farmer suicide crisis. The farmer suicide data for 2016 was released in 2019. A three-year delay for the first time in India's history. The released number said that 11,379 farmers died by suicide in 2016. This is 31 suicides every day. India ranked at 102/117 in the Global Hunger Index report released in 2019. In 2010 this rank was 95. The report states that only 9.6% of all children, between the ages of 6 and 23, in India are provided a minimum acceptable diet. Coronavirus was not stopping millions and millions of rich people in this country from changing this. Corona does not force us to hire private security guards for our colonies far below minimum wage and make them work for 12-14 hours. Corona does not force us to fix the least possible money to pay to domestic workers and then to tell them that this is the 'rate' of the colony as if the rate has been ordained by god. Corona does not force us to argue with and bargain with rikshaw pullers. It did not force us to bargain with roadside vendors while we pay whatever is demanded inside malls.

Corona did not determine our vocabulary about those who are less privileged than us. If I need a pack of cigarettes the paan waala is god sent, if I don't need it then he is a squatter who is ruining the beauty of my city by sitting on the foot-path. I and I am sure many reading this must have heard at least one other person claim that those who are poor are poor because they are lazy; they just don't want to work harder; how they are all thieves; how they are always dirty and so on.

Even during the lockdown, corona did not force us to stop paying our domestic workers, throw out labour from our factories and so on. So let us be honest. All that the pandemic and the lockdown have done is reveal the extent of the cruelty

we happily participate in. The lockdown and the pandemic have simply acted as a mirror, enabling those who want to see the reality of the morals of their selves/their state/country/community whichever group of people it is that you most identify with. I read at many places that Indians are a deeply religious people. The fundamental principle of all religions is to help those who are placed in more difficult circumstances than you are. At the very least, at least in the times of a great crisis religion demands that extraordinary help is given. I have not seen a deeply religious people in the lockdown. Sure there were exceptions here and there, but as the adage goes, exceptions only prove the rule. Similarly I am also told that we are a deeply patriotic country. Patriotism means a fellow of kinship and fraternity with your fellow countrymen. What I saw in the lockdown did not tell me that I live in a deeply patriotic country.

It told me that I live in a country where cruelty has been normalized. Where people have convinced themselves that it is normal for eleven thousand farmers to die by suicide. Over eleven thousand families will lose a loved one and a bread earner and our lives will go on without even so much as a pause. Tremendous hunger even pre-corona, people forced to work as manual scavengers losing their lives, we have told ourselves that all this happens. This is normal. Life should go on.

We are a society which believes that the people who are born in villages are born with the single purpose- to serve those who live in the cities. We may claim that we slavery doesn't exist in our land but we force those who have come to cities to earn a living to live at the absolute margins of 'our' living space. Our relationship with them- even with those who we don't personally employ is that of 'master' and 'servant'. We don't share living space with the poor, we tolerate their existence in exchange for the services that they give to us, which is why we see even the timely payment of their wages as a sign of our generosity.

The states to which the people walking on the streets went are showing relatively very less infections. The states that they have left are showing far more. It was the poor who were at risk of getting the infection from the rich and not vice versa. Why couldn't our communities then enable them to stay where they were, what exactly were they punished for?

Those who built our homes became homeless, those who put food on our plates

started dying of hunger. Nothing caused us to turn up on the streets in large numbers, nothing shook us, not the sight of people sleeping on the railway track with a few rotis being crushed by the train, not the story of a woman who had no option but to deliver a child on the road while walking and sometime after the child was delivered, she stood up and continued walking. Someone told me that a Whatsapp forward was doing the rounds which said that no one is walking, it is just some media organization which is taking people in a truck making them walk and taking photos, because who can possibly walk for such long distances. My thought after hearing this was that people who wear an expensive watch to count the number of steps they take will obviously feel shocked that someone can walk hundreds of kilometers. Even now, when the lockdown has been partially lifted, public transport has not been started. The message then is- that if you can buy a private vehicle you can have the privilege of earning a livelihood. If you don't have a private vehicle then you will not be allowed to work also- or, once again, you can walk.

This is what we will see if we take a long, hard and honest look in the mirror.

The summary is: that at the centre of all this is our failure to value the dignity of an individual. We have completely failed to value human beings. Unless and until we acknowledge the extent of our failings, unless we begin to value human life itself, the cracks in our social fabric will keep widening and make no mistake- the society will completely and finally collapse.



AMIR ULLAH KHAN

DEMOCRACY IN THE POST-COVID WORLD

Aldous Huxley¹ in 1932 and George Orwell in 1949 had both talked about a world that would be run by totalitarian states. Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* were both written during bleak post-war days. The world economy was in tatters. Hatred, suspicion, distrust, and violence guided the autarkies that emerged across the globe. The post-World War 1 Geopolitics was quite different from diplomacy post-World War 2, but the outlook was just as grim. Today, as we look at the devastation caused by a virus deadlier than any, we sense a *déjà vu*. The panic is omnipresent; the gloom extends from New York to Ahmedabad, global supply chains lie in shambles, and oil is selling at negative prices. The great totalitarian regimes across the map are looking on, as mere spectators, waiting for the tragedy to end.

All that was the hallmark of modern living is shut down. Airplanes are parked, trains stranded in their depots, cars, and buses are locked up in garages, and the streets are eerily empty. The only gadgets that work now, and being used ubiquitously are the digital ones. Smartphones, laptops, desktops, tablets are being used for all possible purposes. Webinars are being held, schools have gone online, governments are using hundreds of apps for welfare measures, banking is entirely web-based, and e-commerce is delivering goods and services. In the post Covid era, it is digital technology that will define the New Democracy in a world that threatens to go totalitarian.

The major challenge that the new world will face is the scope creep that comes in with any new technology that becomes available to the state. The latest example is the Arogya Setu app. It was designed very clearly with the purpose of contract tracing. The idea was great, the vision was simple and the implementation quick. However, just as it was to be launched, the vultures swooped in. Now the app will be used as an e-pass for essential service providers. It will also nudge people not so politely to contribute to PM CARES. The Jharkhand High court went further and made downloading the app a necessary condition for bail in a recent order.²

1. Technology

The point is that we are now entering a world where digital infrastructure will be the new medium of transportation. Education and Healthcare are already being transformed in a big way. Now we shall enter a new era of e-commerce and e-tailing. With the pressure on religious institutions to not do what they have always done so well, we will now move towards virtual congregations. Sports events, unthinkable without overflowing stadiums now must be played in-camera with all audience watching on television and tablets. The hotel conference room, a persistent money-spinner, will have to be replaced with a more secure Zoom and a more flexible Google hangout.

The education sector has already seen a transformation. The future of education is already here. The conventional school with hundreds of students, four sitting on one bench, and sharing food and drink with gay abandon seems to be a thing of the past. Already a large number of sessions are being conducted on Zoom, Google Hangouts, Cisco's Webex, and Microsoft teams. What we will need

are more options where schools can run their classes. The security issues surrounding Zoom will have to be ironed out. Zoom is a case study on the impact of technology on any sector post-Covid. The platform had 10 million users in December.³ By March 2020, the number had jumped to 200 million! The software developers could not have ever imagined that their app would become the world's favorite because of such an exogenous event.

What this means is that pedagogy itself will change enormously. The textbook will have to be replaced with readings carefully selected. Evaluation strategies will have to move away completely from the rote learning and the fact-checking mode. But what will be far more critical would be the training of teachers. The classroom teacher will now have to become an online performer. Someone who is able to gather the attention of her students even without having them at the other end of a long whip. The examples will have to be crisp, the diction normal and steady. Lesson plans will be modified considerably, and each session will need to become a complete story in itself. The obvious big advantage is that each lecture will now be recorded and will be available in a digital library for students to go back to, whenever and as many times as required. The major problem, however, is that this technology-based education will only make the access gap wider.

Timetabling, while getting free of the logistical hassle of finding classrooms, will now have to be newly calibrated. In fact, scheduling classes now will now become much easier. There is no longer the need to divide students into sections. A class will have hundreds of students logging in, while tutorials will still be restricted to a small number. The tedium of evaluating physical answer sheets will change, and online evaluation will become that much easier to handle, provided it becomes sophisticated enough to check for plagiarism and cheating.

In this essay, we discuss how this kind of transformation could pose a threat to Democracy in the new world and how a digitally empowered electoral system could solve some of the problems.

Elections – where is Democracy headed?

With big elections coming up soon, especially the one in the United States, technology will need to provide solutions. There has been a debate in the US on elections going digital that technology allows greater tampering and fraud.⁴ The election rallies with thousands of people packed in convention halls and in

fundraising dinners will have to be replaced with less raucous online events. The polling station itself might either be a thing of the past or may transform itself into a quiet workstation with electronic security and streamlined entry for voters. One can even imagine a completely online election system, with adequate security mechanisms and voter identification software in use. Blockchain technology has the potential to bring to elections the same robustness it gets to cryptocurrencies. The republic of Estonia has since 2005 moved to digital voting, and in the last election in 2015, a third of its voters voted using the ‘i-voting’ system⁵.

Both earlier and more contemporary discussions of the concept of Democracy have employed elections as a primary and requisite feature of Democracy. Indeed, if any single institution serves as popular Democracy's sine qua non, it is that of elections. The Corona era shift to technology could now enable impoverished oppositions to reach out to the voter with technological tools and allow voters to vote independently without fear of coercion or retribution.

There is enough literature emerging now that talks of how a high-level electronic governance and electronic voting solution can be implemented. There is architecture that is open, supported by cloud computing architecture and cryptographic technologies, and allows for complete transparency and openness.⁶ In the modern world, a totalitarian regime would not hesitate to subvert the electoral system and use all that it can, legitimately through the use of mass media, or illegitimately through tampered ballots to win elections. The only manner in which this field can be leveled is through large scale use of digital technology that prevents such subversion and allows even poorly funded smaller parties to reach out to all voters in all constituencies.

We have elections coming up, at the same time as in the US, but in the absolutely contrasting countryside of Bihar. The Prime Minister will have to again hire the agency that made his famous holograms six years ago. And if there are very few people attending the rallies and the chairs are empty, that would be good news indeed in the year of physical distancing. The next step will, of course, be to address the technology question. Can the Election Commission use smartphones and IVR phones to enable digital online voting? Or will we have to continue the controversial EVMs or even go back to the old paper ballots? It will be a tough call to take given that Bihar has not even started on its infection journey, and trends suggest that the number of positives in the state will only peak after August 2020.

Elections and Totalitarianism – the conventional and the new

The problem, however, is going to be that of totalitarianism and surveillance. The big state will use whatever it can to get hold of citizen data and then grab as much power it can to use that data citing security, public health, and safety reasons. With such a vice-like grip on its citizenry, the state will have unlimited powers and can use these to mold opinions convenient to itself. This tendency will have to be fought tooth and nail. The horrors of disease breaking out all over have already made people easy targets for state intervention and data abuse. The stigma against those who test positive, those who are branded carriers will feed into the bias against outsiders, and migrants will be targeted at will. In a country that has already spawned a lynching culture, the prospect of what such information can do is horrifying. The horrors of what people with HIV/AIDS went through are too recent in our memory to forget.⁷

¹ In 1961, at the California Medical School in San Francisco, Huxley had forewarned "There will be in the next generation or so a pharmacological method of making people love their servitude and producing dictatorship without tears, so to speak, producing a kind of painless concentration camp for entire societies so that people will in fact have their liberties taken away from them but will rather enjoy it."

² <https://lawsisto.com/legalnewsread/NDAYOQ==/IN-ORDER-TO-GET-BAIL-IN-STALL-AROGYA-SETU-APP-AND-DONATE-TO-PM-CARES-JHARKHAND-HC>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52133349>

⁴ Alvarez, R. M., & Hall, T. E. (2010). Electronic elections: The perils and promises of digital Democracy

⁵ A detailed description of this and the robustness of the block chain enabled voting system is available at <https://www.economist.com/sites/default/files/plymouth.pdf>

⁶ Zissis, D., & Lekkas, D. (2011). Securing e-Government and e-Voting with an open cloud computing architecture. *Government Information Quarterly*, 28(2), 239-251.

⁷ "HIV/AIDS related stigma (H/A stigma) is invoked as a persistent and pernicious problem in any discussion about effective responses to the epidemic. In addition to devastating the familial, social, and economic lives of individuals, H/A stigma is cited as a major barrier to accessing prevention, care, and treatment services". Mahajan, A. P., Set al (2008). Stigma in the HIV/AIDS epidemic: a review of the literature and recommendations for the way forward. *AIDS*



DEEPAK MAHESHWARI

REBOOTING AND RETOOLING THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM

Enough has been written, spoken, and analyzed about the Covid19 pandemic that has effectively put more than half the global population under lockdown. In addition to the healthcare research and eternal optimism within humanity at large, it is the digital ecosystem that has come into sharp focus.

Zooming in and out of conference calls while working from home; seeing and speaking with friends and family members on social media; resorting to online news due to difficulty in access to the physical newspaper; playing games online; searching for a new recipe; binge-watching movies and shows or for that matter, children attending online classes on smartphones – all these might not have been

possible even a decade back. Yes, even five years back, many of these would not be pragmatic due to high costs and latency though these were in the realm of technical feasibility at that time already.

Obviously, the Internet infrastructure has worked for us reasonably well thanks to low-cost smartphones with high-resolution cameras, bigger screens, and enhanced memory coupled with cheap data tariffs on 4G networks. However, all is not well, as seen in the reduced speeds, increased latency, the rise of fraud, and fake news pertaining to Covid19 alone.

Hence, even as we prepare the exit strategy from the ensuing lockdown, we also need to rethink, reengineer and redesign not just the digital ecosystem but, more importantly, the underlying social contract amongst all the stakeholders. The objective should be to create resilient infrastructure, build institutional and individual capacity, and instill trust within, via, and throughout the digital ecosystem while also addressing inequalities and exclusion.

Secure Greater Digital Inclusion

Thanks to tariffs continuously going down, low-cost devices, enablement via touchscreen, and enhanced availability of audio-visual content, the breadth of internet access via mobile phones has expanded significantly around the world.

Cost, complexity, and a perceived “lack of interest” are the three prime factors still keeping several people offline, according to The Great Digital Divide, published by the Capgemini Research Institute in May 2020.¹

Being offline has severe social and economic implications. These include social exclusion, limited career prospects, hindrance in access to public services and benefits, financial hardships, and health inequality. All the same, while globally 48% of the offline population wanted Internet access and 44% evinced digital literacy, corresponding numbers in India were 61% and 66%, maximum on both the counts globally, thereby implying enormous pent-up demand and interest.

According to the report ‘Digital in 2019 – Round 2 Report’ by Nielsen for the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) released in May 2020, there were 504 million Internet users in India implying that just 38% of India’s population was online² as against 50% globally.³

As a result, more than 800 million Indians were still offline. While more users in urban areas are multi-device users, at an aggregate level, 99% of all users, whether in urban or in rural areas, do use the Internet (at least) on a mobile device.

According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), at the end of 2019, rural teledensity was just 56%, almost one-third of urban at 156%.⁴ Gender inequality is also quite sharp with women accounting for just 35% of all Internet users in the country.

The participation of women as users is slightly better yet unsatisfactory in urban areas at 40% as compared to just 31% in rural areas.

Various studies point to an extremely large gender gap, whereas mobile ownership in India is concerned.⁵⁶⁷ There are similar gaps across standards of education and living, age and extent of (dis)abilities, etc.

Many families do not even have a mobile phone, leave aside a smartphone, and often they may not be able to afford the data tariffs. Worse, small screen size with poor resolution, poor connectivity, or poor visibility in terms of ambient lighting makes it difficult for many people, such as students, to access any significant service meaningfully.

Strengthen the Creaking Digital Infrastructure

Rather than public transport, it is the Internet which has become our lifeline. Whether it is about catching up with the news or sharing with friends your views, online ordering of essential supplies and medicines or jamming up with friends for a virtual music concert, we are dependent on the Internet. Likewise, apprehension of infection and lack of access to physical cash is nudging many to opt for digital payments. Also, video consumption and viewership on the Internet has gone up significantly both for curated content and the user-generated one. And while one had argued for regulatory flexibility for ‘Work From Home’ way back in 2004, it has become the de facto operating procedure in these times.⁸

To be sure, despite being ranked at 130 out of 140 countries in terms of mobile data speed⁹, at 11GB per month, the average Indian broadband customer consumes more data than anybody else¹⁰ thanks to the world’s lowest data tariff in absolute terms at just Rs. 3.50 (USD 0.05) per GB.¹¹ However, even a smartphone costing USD 50 and a monthly tariff of USD 2 is still beyond the realm of afford-

ability for millions living under extreme duress below the poverty line who struggle to get two square meals every day.

A pandemic like the Covid-19 was going to inevitably impact the performance of the global Internet infrastructure and impact it has. According to the latest update of Tracking Covid-19's Impact on Global Internet Performance published by Ookla updated on 4 May 2020,¹² the average speed on fixed broadband in India had already gone down by 8% while on the mobile it was even sharper decline by 10%. In sharp contrast, China saw 22% increment on both these counts!

Share Facts to Counter Fake News

For many an expert, this 'infodemic' is even more challenging than the epidemic! Loads of fake news and misinformation/disinformation is floating around. These include but are not limited to the conspiracy theory of connecting Covid19 spread with 5G¹³ and a litany of 'effective' remedies – neither of is backed by evidence of course.

It is encouraging that government officials have been conducting regular press conferences. Also, there are official microsites on Covid19 at MyGov portal, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website, and the data.gov.in portal, sharing real-time data, trends, and infographics, in line with the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NSDAP), 2012. Similar endeavors have been taken up by state governments and local administration as well. Even issuance of passes for movement is an online process.

As for fake news, it is imperative to instill skills and values like critical thinking, scientific temper, and logical reasoning coupled with greater compassion and empathy amongst the population at large. This will enable us to consume, share, and create news and views based on authentic facts rather than on hearsay, half-truths, or even white lies. Again, technology can help in this context to some extent, as shown by fact-checking websites and services like Fact-Checker and Alt News. The recent move by the government's Press Information Bureau to offer a fact-checking service and response to one and all would also go a long way.

Accordingly, the challenge of fake news must be addressed within the prevalent social context and the prevailing political economy.

Invest in Digital Literacy

The first wave of Internet users in India belonged to higher socioeconomic strata and mostly lived in one of the metro cities or another large city like state capital. In addition, most of them were proficient in English, and yes, the access was mostly from desktop and laptop computers.

The second wave of users mostly belonged to the middle class and had reasonable, if not full proficiency in English. In terms of geography, most of them were in cities. While the spread occurred in rural areas as well, but this was comparatively to a lesser extent. Meanwhile, teledensity in many metros went way beyond 100% at par with the developed countries.

However, the third wave of Next Half Billion Internet¹⁴ users in India expected to join the online bandwagon over the next five years or so may need drastically different cost structure as well as service and device portfolio. Many of them may be functionally illiterate in the traditional sense but would still need digital literacy. That is indeed a daunting challenge, but the emerging solutions would be relevant not only within India but for much of the global south.

Last but not least, it is encouraging that as per the Nielsen - IAMA report, the growth rate amongst female users was 21% compared to its penultimate study while the male user base grew up by just 9%. With greater access, affordability, awareness, and empowerment, this trend of female users outstripping their male counterparts should only accelerate.

Of course, in both the second and the third wave, several new users belonging to the higher strata continue and would continue to join. These could be additional family members, including children or those who moved up socially.

Ensure Cyber Security and Privacy

Digital Economy is expected to account for one-fifth by the time that the national GDP becomes five trillion dollars.¹⁵ However, this cannot happen in an environment of poor cybersecurity of our critical infrastructure and poor cyber hygiene amongst users at large.

Accordingly, the upcoming National Cyber Security Strategy 2020 is being developed on the three pillars viz. 'Secure', 'Strengthen', and 'Synergise'. Mean-

while, the Personal Data Protection Law must protect the fundamental right to privacy of the individuals and give the latter a greater agency while still allowing the businesses and other entities to offer innovative products and service.¹⁶ In addition, the government needs to have narrow exceptions and exemptions to fulfill its legitimate objectives like national security and law enforcement.

We need to embrace and pursue both security and privacy simultaneously such that they reinforce each other rather than having to choose between the two.¹⁷

Instill Cyber Hygiene

It would be unfair to put all the responsibilities on the government or businesses. We all as users also need to be careful about how we use the Internet and how we behave with others online; what we share and what we forward; how we avoid the pitfalls of phishing sites and other scams. In addition, everyone, including children and women, the old and the disabled – everyone must feel and remain safe within the cyberspace.

Of course, the situation is far from perfect. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cybercrimes in the country went up by 77% within a year,¹⁸ while the number of cybersecurity incidents observed by the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT India) went up almost four times within a year.¹⁹

Soon after the PM-CARES Fund was announced in March 2020, a clutch of UPI (Unified Payment Interface) ID's with similar-sounding names had been registered while overall, more than 4,000 fraudulent portals pertaining to Covid19 had sprung up within a span of two months.²⁰

Hence, the users must be both aware of the risks and what they should do to mitigate the same. Just like we are observing social distancing and taking other preventions like using a mask while going out and disinfecting ourselves with thorough handwash, if we practice basic cyber hygiene like keeping softwares updated; using different yet difficult passwords for different devices, apps, accounts and services; encrypting data whether in transit or at rest; and not clicking on suspicious links, as individuals we would be doing our bit to keep the cyberspace safe and secure.

A Stitch in Time Saves Nine!

Disasters or epidemics may not be visible but are inevitable. The onus is on us not just to be prepared but also to keep abreast of the emerging threats and taking appropriate and timely action to thwart them.

After all, isn't prevention better than cure?

¹ <https://www.capgemini.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Infographic-%E2%80%93-Digital-Divide.pdf>

² <https://cms.iamai.in/Content/ResearchPapers/2286f4d7-424f-4bde-be88-6415fe5021d5.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.indiatimes.com/technology/news/more-than-half-the-world-s-population-is-now-online-and-internet-services-are-booming-369089.html>

⁵ <http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2019.pdf>

⁶ <http://indianexpress.com/article/technology/tech-news-technology/internet-in-india-gaping-gender-gap-5296818/>

⁷ <https://www.indiaspend.com/wide-gender-gap-in-mobile-phone-access-is-hurting-indias-women/>

⁸ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/deepakmaheshwari1_2004-article-urging-regulatory-approval-for-activity-6659341623941574656-KFo8

⁹ <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index/india#mobile>

¹⁰ <https://www.livemint.com/industry/telecom/indians-consume-over-11gb-data-per-month-report-11582802282339.html>

¹¹ <https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/news/story/4g-data-charges-may-go-up-by-10x-as-airtel-jio-and-vodafone-ask-govt-to-set-minimum-floor-price-1654756-2020-03-12>

¹² <https://www.speedtest.net/insights/blog/tracking-covid-19-impact-global-internet-performance/#/>

¹³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062362>

¹⁴ https://www.omidyar.com/sites/default/files/file_archive/Next%20Half%20Billion/Innovating%20for%20Next%20Half%20Billion.pdf

¹⁵ https://meity.gov.in/writereaddata/files/india_trillion-dollar_digital_opportunity.pdf

¹⁶ http://164.100.47.4/BillsTexts/LSBillTexts/Asintroduced/373_2019_LS_Eng.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/securing-the-right-to-privacy/article21302647.ece1>

¹⁸ <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ncrb-data-cyber-crime-jumped-by-77-in-2017-6082779/>

¹⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/3-13-lakh-cyber-security-incidents-reported-till-october-this-year/articleshow/72489906.cms>

²⁰ <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/coronavirus-in-india-heat-on-rings-eyeing-pm-cares-funds-1661576-2020-03-31>



ARUN MAIRA

RULES FOR UN-MAKING AND REMAKING THE WORLD

This is a crisis about the very existence of the planet. Within that, the most important part is not about human beings existing with each other in the shape that we were used to, but also our ability to live with the planet in another relationship. Presently there is also a crisis of the condition of our society. We are isolated; everything is disrupted; we need to think about what it means to be a member of the human society.

I think there is a positive aspect of this crisis also. You hear people exclaim that the rivers are cleaner, we see more birds. The question is, what will we do when we come out of the crisis, now that we will be given the option of returning to the

world as it was. Would we do that, would we want to that? If yes, that is a crisis of aspiration.

We need to understand that there were millions who did not have a home to be locked down in. When we asked people to stay inside their homes, they showed us that they don't have a home. We need to think whether restoring the status quo to such a world would be a success? We need to choose to build a better world for the vulnerable and the underprivileged.

Our very way of living has become against nature itself. I think for about the last hundred-odd years or more, when we have started to think of Human Progress in terms of material growth. Everyone now believes that if I were to have more stuff around me, then my life will be a better life, and also that humanity has progressed by enabling people to have more stuff around them. So we have become very consumerist. Our satisfaction is not coming out of harmony; it is coming out of consumption. Consumption is driving the material economy, so we have advertising which tempts people to buy things which they are doing very happily without. It intrigues me to see that Apple, which has become the most valuable company in the world- it produces smartphones, and every year it produces a little variant in the smartphone, and if you didn't have that variant, you feel you aren't progressing in life, and you feel dissatisfied.

You don't think that, before you had the phone you have now, weren't you happy? And I would say, even before we had smartphones, weren't we happy? Who is benefitting by this larger consumption? Certainly, those who manufacture the stuff we buy. But those who are consuming it, are they really benefitting from all this consumption?

We say India is so blessed we have an "aspirational workforce". But what are they aspiring for? Economists etc. are very excited about this term. This workforce aspires for a motorcycle; they aspire for a smartphone; they aspire for going to the gym; and they aspire for more consumption.

We are changing human nature while wanting the economy to grow. We all seem to be in service of the economy, to help the economy grow by consuming more and more. We need to go back and realize that the purpose of the economy should be to serve humanity and society instead of humanity and society serving the economy. This is the big shift that must happen.

My friend Shekhar Kapoor, the film director who won an Oscar many years ago for his film *Elizabeth in Hollywood*- for the last 15-20 years he has been making documentaries on the lives of Indian communities and how they live when their lives are unspoiled by the internet, and he draws a contrast with the Indians who are joining the ‘modern world’. He was in a remote village near Almora when the pandemic struck, and he got locked in there. He told me that the people there, who grow a little and pluck a little, and a few have goats, they’re not worried about Covid. Such a simple life. This is what we really need to ‘aspire’ for so that we can become real again.

Have you noticed how companies say, “ we want a larger share of the consumer’s wallet?” They don’t say we want a larger place in a human being’s heart. They want me to earn more so that I can buy the stuff they produce.

We blindly pursued ‘Globalisation’, not worrying much about its side effects. Now, as it happens, it seems we have got overdosed. What we thought was a cure turned out to be worse than the problem we set out to remedy. Our addiction to this ‘cure’ has now become a disease. Endless greed, combined with unbridled Globalisation, was the first pandemic. In the global economy paradigm, people must produce whatever they do better than others on a large scale and sell to others. And they should buy from others what others produce better than what they do, also on a large scale. Thus, no one produces everything. Everyone produces only parts of the complete thing. This is a very fragile and unhealthy system. Imagine if you have great kidneys, and I have great lungs, and someone else has a great heart, and we say let’s each of us not have all the parts of the body. Let us use the best of each others’ organs. And let each of us have that only that organ, and have it on a large enough scale to serve everybody, and then connect everyone together. What will happen to us? If anyone of us became sick, all of us would become sick. We applied this logic of specialization and scale in economics, and in that process, we have been reducing the resilience of the global economy and society. We are also breaking up the natural environment. We grow only one crop, or one variety of tree, on scale, and convert these natural products into commodities to trade with each other on scale.

Speaking about globalization and the environment, I must mention Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in economics. She postulated eight principles of governance for communities to manage their commons—i.e., the en-

vironment that they share:

1. Define clear group boundaries.
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.
5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system."

You can see that these rules lay great emphasis on the 'local' management and ownership of common resources. Tremendous strife in the world and especially in India, could have been avoided if we had followed these principles.

To conclude, I will share the principles I believe we will need to adopt if we, as a society, as a species, want to become sustainably healthy again. I wrote about them in *The Hindu*, and I'll reproduce an excerpt besides listing them out.

The first is 'De-Growth'. I wrote in *The Hindu*: "The obsession with GDP as the supreme goal of progress has been challenged often, but its challengers were dismissed as a loony fringe. Now, Nobel laureates in economics (Stiglitz, Sen, Banerjee, Duflo, and others) are calling upon their profession to rethink the fundamentals of economics, especially the purpose of GDP. A 5-point 'de-growth' manifesto by 170 Dutch academics has gone viral amidst the heightened internet buzz during the lock-down. Goals for human progress must be reset. What should we aspire for? And how will we measure if we are getting there?"

The other principles or I daresay learnings from this crisis are 'Boundaries be-

tween countries are good; Government is good (This does not mean the government can do no wrong but that the primary responsibility for welfare lies with and is best exercised by the government.); The market is not the best solution; (If we don't understand this even now we are most certainly doomed. We touched on this earlier, and as Piketty put it: "We want capitalism and market forces to be the slave of democracy rather than the opposite."); 'Citizen' welfare, not 'consumer' welfare, must be the objective of progress; Competition must be restrained: Collaboration is essential for progress and finally as the nightmarish scenario of someone discovering a cure and not sharing it or making it too expensive has taught us, ultimately, Intellectual property belongs to the public.



OSAMA MANZAR

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SMALL BUSINESS, SMALL DATA, BIG TRUST

Isn't it too long a distance to walk? I asked an extremely old woman walking with a large group on its way from Delhi to Bihar on foot. I couldn't understand her answer, so I had to ask a few men who were walking with her and on whose face a small smile had broken out when she answered, to translate for me. "kah rahi hain Jitna doori dilli aur Bihar mein hai usse zyaada doori hamaare ghar mein aur dilli mein jis kothi mein hum kaam karte hain usmein hai babusahab"

In an attempt to combat the Covid Pandemic, the Government of India had enforced a lockdown at a four-hour notice. While announcing this lockdown, it

had emphasized the importance of ‘social distancing’. Within a few days, television and print news began showing the hundreds of thousands of people walking on the road- no other means of transport was available. I, along with a few colleagues from Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), managed to obtain the requisite passes and began a drive from Delhi across large parts of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

It is important to understand, many of these people were used to sleeping in the factories where they were employed; many were daily wage workers who literally lived day-to-day and went hungry when they did not get work; many were street hawkers who also depended on daily earnings to survive; many who had enough money in hand to survive but not enough to pay rent and were thrown out overnight by their landlords; many fired by employers who believed that the lockdown would last long and also believed that they had all the right to fire their employees in the hour of crisis.

I started with a question I asked, but through most of the journey, believe it or not, I was the one subjected to questions from the people who were walking, and I rarely had any answers. We were stopping along the way to distribute relief material, sanitizers, soap, clean water, food, and some other items.

I will share some of them: “We made your cities with our bare hands, why did you leave us in slums? The houses we build for you last hundreds of years. The houses you allow us to afford get destroyed in every rain, why? We get your vegetables, cook your food, clean your clothes, clean your cars, drive your cars, clean your roads, your drains, why couldn’t you support us with dignity for a short period of time? So and so NGO used to speak to us, give us medicines and food, but now we hear that the government has shut them down, why? When you disowned us, why didn’t you tell your police not to beat us at least? Why does the police system that you have built treat us like enemies? What kind of police and courts have you made?”

Indians don’t need to study sociology to understand migration. There is a template conversation which happens across classes, across languages in Indian cities- you ask someone where is your home, and often if the person mentions the same city where the conversation is happening, you say: “No no, I mean which part of the country do you belong to or “Where are you originally from.” At the inception

of India's independence, economic activity was concentrated in a few places in the country- Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Chennai, and so on. Across classes in nearly every single generation, people went out of their 'home-town' to study; to work; to marry. Sometimes 'transferable' jobs took people across towns, families which started as large joint families transformed into multiple nuclear families in multiple cities. We worked in places different from our parents, sent money home, received food and sweets from home, sent letters, money orders, telegrams when it was necessary.

Long before the phrase was invented and long before couriers arrived in India, Indians had mastered their very own organic 'supply chain'. Each home had a phenomenal 'network' of friends, neighbors, relatives, neighbor's friends and relatives, relatives' friends and neighbors- you get the drift. A suitable person traveling to the intended destination in the near future was identified, and the product safely dispatched via this network that even today, no corporate giant can dream of matching.

For a wedding in a family, again, this vast network came to the aid of the person/family in question. Neighbors opened their homes for the staying arrangement of the guests. People came forward with all sorts of help- mattresses, clothes, furniture, whatever was required. If the homemaker in a house fell ill, the food for the children would come from the neighbors if not from a relative.

By making these points, I am not indulging in nostalgia. I am making the point that social trust was a valid currency. Delivery of grocery did not have a 'Flipkart guarantee' and was not 'Amazon Assured' but was readily extended on credit lines diligently documented in small notebooks. Every residential area had an 'Amazon Pantry' or 'MilkBasket' of its own.

What were the odds of milk becoming unavailable in a crisis at such a time? Inequality in access was a reality then and is a reality now; also, I am not painting the picture of a social utopia. The central hypothesis of this essay is that the entry of 'Big Business' and the obsession with "Scaling Up" has caused significant damage to society and the way out if the dystopia we find ourselves in will have to begin from a different path. Broadly speaking, the damage I speak of is twofold. First, a drastic and unsustainable shift from a need to a want-based economy and second, a dangerous reduction in social

dependence and, therefore, a diminishing of social trust, leaving all of us vulnerable and helpless before threats like this pandemic.

We now know that Climate Change and deforestation are resulting in diseases spilling over from animals to humans. I will put what I have understood in the layperson's language. Scientists believe that there are two dominant causes behind an unnatural movement of wildlife from its habitat to human habitats. First is Climate change. Many animals seek colder temperatures and move towards colder areas. Second is deforestation- a specific subset of Climate Change- which causes animals that have never interacted with humans or shared habitats with humans to now live in the same areas as humans. These animals carry many viruses that humans do not know about. Transmission of such viruses can cause pandemics.

A scientific paper published in April 2020¹ states: "Exploitation of wildlife through hunting and trade facilitates close contact between wildlife and humans, and our findings provide further evidence that exploitation, as well as anthropogenic activities that have caused losses in wildlife habitat quality, have increased opportunities for animal-human interactions and facilitated zoonotic disease transmission."

Professor Hand Otto Poertner, head of biosciences at the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) and chair of the impacts chapter of the next 'major assessment report' from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in an interview to Carbon Brief²

"Climate change is clearly a factor that can influence these relationships. Climate change shapes the biogeographical distribution of species. If, in the future, we see species moving into areas where humans are prevalent, we could see new opportunities for pandemics to evolve."

So we know that fundamental human greed, the concentration of wealth in corporations disguised as 'growth' and 'scaling up' etc. have now become an existential threat to all of humanity. We know that an increase in sea levels is not the only way this threat is going to manifest.

Now let's come to deterioration in social trust. This diminishing of social trust operated in various ways. Earlier, I knew the name of the person who supplied

groceries to me; I knew the milkman. Now, especially in cities, people do not care. A man comes and delivers a box to me. I do not know who it is, I do not need to know also, next time it will be a different person. I do not know what this person is paid. I do not need to know how this person travels or in what conditions does this person live.

This is just an illustrative example. All the people walking on the streets didn't come out of some secret area none of us had ever heard of. They have come from or near the areas where the middle class-‘people like us’ live. They service our lives. They have been laid off by companies we purchase from. We decide their wages. Our habits decide where they will live and how much rent they will pay. Why did we not know about their condition and why did it take a pandemic for us to realize that millions around us are living on a day to day subsistence?

What an irony it is that the class which prospered because it ‘migrated’ is criminally and blissfully unaware of the existence and lived realities of other migrants? We did not just let ‘Big Business’ provide goods and services; we let them restructure our society.

In this background comes the coronavirus pandemic, and what is the first message that we give out with the lockdown-don't trust anyone. The already reduced level of social trust is now completely wiped out. The announcement of a complete nationwide lockdown at a mere four-hour notice creates panic. If I have to draw an analogy, it was almost like there has been a nuclear leak and as if the infection would mean certain death. The damage this did to the society's psyche will be challenging to repair.

A story that became ‘viral’ on social media and left an indelible impression on me: a family threw out their full-time domestic worker on the road at night after she tested positive for Covid-19. She sat out there, crying for hours people surrounded her; many more may have got infected. Ultimately a fellow domestic worker from the same society took her to her home because even authorities told her to go home and ‘isolate’ herself. All this was the result of deterioration of trust.

Before we move to the possible solutions, let us look at what we tried to do, what worked, and what did not. At a time when the poor were the most vulnerable, we

didn't take enough time to prepare and train them. We could have done this had we started in January or even February. We could have educated and trained street vendors and let them operate. If this had happened, we would not have seen horrific images of police personnel overturning vegetable carts -wasting food at a time of great hunger and also depriving someone of livelihood. We beat up the street vegetable seller and mil vendor, and we supported the big corporations selling these things.

There was one crucial area where the strength of big business could have and should have been leveraged but was not: Telecom operators. While on the one hand there was so much talk about working through phones; teaching through phones; telemedicine and what not, 2000 out of 12000 migrant workers, who started traveling back to their homes, made a call to a toll-free number to complain and seek help for their mobiles to be topped-up and recharged.

The toll-free number was provided by Jan Sahas, a not-for-profit organisation. I have written about this elsewhere,³ but the five significant things the workers who called Jan Sahas underlined were:

Mobile batteries were dead and there was no way to charge them

As most were prepaid users, they ran out of balance, and there was not enough money to recharge

They were usually moving in groups because there would be at least one working mobile in each group which would help them stay connected

There was nobody to depend on – the police were chasing them away, highways were blocked, and social distancing was keeping all away

The only hope was to have mobile phones working so that calls for help could be placed and they could let their families and relatives know where they were and how they were moving

As early as 9th April 2020 I wrote to the Prime Minister's office⁴ and underlined that: "...as the influx of migration increases in the rural areas it going to raise the expectation of public service delivery of social protection schemes through existing e-governance architectures. Through its own experience of working with communities DEF has seen how One-Time-Passwords (OTP) sent to mobile numbers have now become indispensable to access ration through the public distribution system (PDS) as biometric authentication devices are phased out as a public health and safety measure. This further reinforces the function of internet and digital de-

vices as media for public service delivery in rural India. Through its work in leveraging information and communication technology and access to information in extending social protection coverage and building rural entrepreneurship models, DEF has seen the role that internet, connectivity, and the potentialities predicated on them have on improving livelihoods and income opportunities in rural areas...”

I further proposed that a ‘Pradhan Mantri Free Talk Time and Internet Sewa Yojana’ which would involve, inter-alia, the following measures: That the government declares complete free access to telecom and data for all those who are Below Poverty Line (BPL); who rely on ration; who depend on MN-REGA, who are migrant workers, who are daily wagers, and who are part of the informal sector.

A digital crisis response plan under Digital India that focuses on focuses on unintended exclusions of the unconnected be formulated.

While we did not receive any response from the government, you would agree that something like this could have been done easily and would have gone a long way in dealing with the present crisis.

Sooner or later, whether through herd immunity, the invention of a cure or a vaccine, or other unforeseen solutions, this pandemic will be history. That in itself will not mean that we will be prepared for the next pandemic, which we now can be fairly certain will definitely come; it is just a matter of time and shape and form. The damage done by this pandemic not just in terms of economic loss but in terms of rebuilding social trust will also not be repaired automatically. Social trust, which was deteriorating earlier and is now at an all time low will not rebuild itself. The book “Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered” by Ernst Friedrich Schumacher was published in 1973. Let me begin by citing a few quotes from the book which go to the heart of the matter:

“Modern man does not experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it. He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that, if he won the battle, he would find himself on the losing side.”

“The real problems of our planet are not economic or technical, they are philosophical. The philosophy of unbridled materialism is being challenged by events.”

“How could we even begin to disarm greed and envy? Perhaps by being much less greedy and envious ourselves; perhaps by resisting the temptation of letting our luxuries become needs; and perhaps by even scrutinising our needs to see if they cannot be simplified and reduced.”

“where is the rich society that says: ‘Halt! We have enough?’”

The fact of the matter is that the solution for the economy, the measures required to prevent the next pandemic, and to deal with the next pandemic if we are unable to prevent it lie on the same fundamental path- going local. The government has referred to the phrase ‘going local,’ and the specifics are yet to be seen but to my mind going local cannot simply mean not buying from x or y country. It will have to mean a fundamental restructuring of the way in which we, our society, our democracy and our economy operates. It will require a serious pursuit of a much misunderstood and abused idea: Reform.

It will have to mean that government urgently commences radical decentralization. It will have to mean that government enables and encourages communities to trust each other. It will mean creating local capacity in terms of healthcare essentials, public transport, and more. It will mean that the competition law of the country will have to be changed so that the end of monopoly does not remain the only goal but the sustenance of small businesses becomes an objective. It will have to mean that attempts at bridging the digital divide do not end at the penetration of messaging services like WhatsApp. It will have to mean that ownership of data is decentralized and entrusted with the people at various levels. With increased reliance by both government and people on internet for even something like daily rations, it will have to mean that in times of crisis, telecom operators will have to offer access to a reasonable amount of internet and calling. It will have to mean that when a crisis happens, people are prepared and able to trust each other without barriers of class and identity. It will have to mean that even at a time of crisis, citizens can find solutions by turning to ‘local’ and not be dependant on a vast government machinery. The citizenry does not need saviours it needs enabling and training. I will conclude with a quote from Schumaker:

“It is moreover obvious that men organised in small units will take better care of their bit of land or other natural resources than anonymous companies or megalomaniac governments which pretend to themselves that the whole universe is their legitimate quarry.”

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32259475/>

² <https://www.carbonbrief.org/q-and-a-could-climate-change-and-biodiversity-loss-raise-the-risk-of-pandemics>

³ <https://www.defindia.org/project/we-need-pradhan-mantri-free-talk-time-and-internet-yojna-during-covid19-2/>

⁴ <https://www.defindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Recommendation-Pradhan-Mantri-Free-Talk-Time-and-Internet-Sewa-Yojana.pdf>



SOMEN MISHRA

FILM INDUSTRY & COVID: WORK FROM HOME & WATCH FROM HOME

In 2018, Netflix launched *Bandersnatch*, an original film which is part of well-known sci-fi dystopian anthology, *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker. But unlike any other Netflix film or series, this one was interactive. As the film's lead character, Stefan, struggles with the choices in his life, the viewer could decide what the character would do at various stages. It starts with giving simple tasks to choose from – what cereal will Stefan have for breakfast or what music he will listen to, and slowly, it gets more intense – how will he take revenge, how will he kill someone, what will he do with the dead body. Even though one is picking from the options given, it gives a God complex feel to the audience, where you decide the fate of the protagonist and the people around him.

In these corona times, when nothing seems to be in our control since the last few months, I kept wondering if *Bandersnatch* would have given us that sense of ‘control’. I went back and played the movie again. It surely works, even if it’s just for the time being when you are watching the film. Will this be one of the big ideas for the movies in the post-Covid era? More intimate, more interactive, more immersive, more ‘in-control’, and in your home. I hope so. Because this is something that will be impossible for theatrical films to offer, it works best in this work from home environment.

In tangible terms, as we all have got used to zoom meetings, and with lockdown norms relaxed, conversations have started about how and when can the shoots start. There are guidelines from Producers Guild, the precaution measures that need to be taken, and the possible scenarios of having a tightly controlled unit. All these steps also mean extra cost on the budgets, and more time in completing every shooting schedule. With theatres shut for months, satellite and music prices hit badly with the economic slump, the budget versus revenue chart is going to be an uphill task to manage. As expected, OTTs (‘Over The Top’) are the only platforms that have seen growth in the current climate, and they have deep pockets too. But the challenge for them will be to hold on to these new subscribers, and for that, they need new content. No wonder that they have been on a movie buying spree. The films that were ready for theatrical releases are now looking at OTT premieres. Shoojit Sircar’s *Gulabo Sitabo* (Amitabh Bachchan-Ayushmann Khurrana), Anu Menon’s *Shakuntala Devi* (Vidya Balan) and Sharan Sharma’s *Gunjan Saxena* (Jhanvi Kapoor) will be the first ones to drop. But this also creates a paradigm shift in movie perception.

Internationally, Netflix has been able to rope some of the biggest names for its original films, be it Martin Scorsese or Bong Joon Ho, Brad Pitt, Sandra Bullock, or Will Smith, to name a few. In India, so far, there was a difference in the perception of a theatrical release versus a digital one. Some stars are considered too big to do OTT films, and some don’t have that big an audience pull to get a solo theatrical release. The box office numbers were the big distinguishing factor. But with OTTs cashing in on this pandemic situation and wooing the big names to come to OTT, the perception partition is vanishing faster than one could have imagined.

Without Covid, this would have been another impossible task. Nobody ever imagined that you could see a new Amitabh Bachchan film ‘*First Day First Show*’ in the comfort of your bedroom. The distribution and exhibition lobby have been

fiercely against the OTT premieres and have spoken out bluntly, but that's not going to stop any producer.

And this revenue model is going to impact the kind of stories and films the directors and the producers are going to pick and tell. The big-budget event films which were either in development or production, have taken a back seat in every studio and production house. They are either shelved, put on the back-burner, or the budgets are being relooked at.

Any film sequence which requires large crowds is getting edited out on script. The medium to low budget films with a quality concept at the core of it will be the big draw. Because if one is looking at the uncertainty of theatrical releases, one can always fall back on OTT. With big-budget films, the risk is much higher, and one doesn't have any other option but to wait for the theatres.

The genre of films is also going to have a skewed ratio. With budget cuts and the depressing weather that we are in, the demand will be for more comedies, more humor, more slice-of-life stories. Imagine, a film like Shoojit Sircar's October releasing in the theatres post-lockdown. Will that get anyone excited? I doubt.

In the last few months, the post-production department has done the maximum heavy lifting work. Because it could have been done from home or in an isolated workspace. But it also showed us how we could use more of virtual production instead of real. That will cut down heavily on shooting floors, which are always full of people and frenetic activity. More virtual production means less people and not in the same physical space. The budgets are again going to a big factor, but the good part is new technology keeps becoming more inexpensive with more demand. If social distancing is going to be the new norm, tech has to be our new best friend.

The exhibition and distribution sector is upbeat about the audience coming back to theatres as soon as they are allowed to open. Apart from the usual SOP (sanitizer, masks, disinfectant), theatre chains are already brainstorming on new ideas that will give more confidence to the audience. PVR, country's biggest theatre chain, is considering going completely cash-less so that there is no human interaction involved. They are currently testing it in one of their properties. In January 2020, Maharashtra government allowed the cinema halls in Mumbai to

be open 24 hours as part of its larger plan “Mumbai 24 Hours”. This will come handy now as the new seating arrangement would have to take social distancing in consideration. And that means keeping every alternate seat row/column free. So the theatres will need more shows, and that means more opening hours. Some of the countries have been experimenting with open-air and drive-in cinemas, as these two concepts automatically allow people to maintain a safe distance. In India, the concept has been dead for a long time now. So, it won't be a bad idea to tap into it to assure the audience of the utmost safety.

In the film festival circuit, Cannes is counted as the big daddy of all. Since this year the festival was cancelled, the organisers still announced the selection list of the films to boost their market viability. The domino effect continued on other festivals, and they have either been cancelled or on indefinite hold till there is some clarity. But it also created a unique opportunity for the first of its kind global film festival titled We Are One.

Some of the biggest and most prestigious fests like Cannes, Berlin, Tribeca, Sundance, Toronto, New York, Locarno came together to stream movies online for free on YouTube. It opened the doors for bringing fests to home when one can't afford to go to fests.

For now, for the film industry, 'Work From Home' also means 'Watch from Home'. And if one is as talented as Charlie Brooker-he even did a new edition of his annual news wrap, Wipe. The pandemic edition was called Anti-Viral Screen-wipe, bringing the much-needed antidote to the pandemic. But even Brooker confessed that the world has stolen his nightmare fuel. For someone who is always anticipating and writing about the worst things that could happen to mankind, he is not working on any new Black Mirror episode as he feels the world doesn't have the appetite for it any more right now. It reminded me of a mock campaign created by a Madrid based creative agency, which went viral recently. It had a big rectangular mirror put in the middle of a street. The text on it said Black Mirror. 6th Season. Live Now, everywhere. As passers-by clicked their images wearing masks and protective gear, it summed up the world around us perfectly, which has changed forever.



PARTH MN

SCHOOLING POST CORONA: WILL RURAL INDIA BE EXCLUDED?

A bunch of boys sat under a tree in one of the tribal villages of Maharashtra's Palghar district. Early June, at around noon, the air was still, the temperature hot and humid. At first glance, I thought the boys were sitting under the tree to get some respite from the blistering sun. A closer look, though, revealed something else. That spot was where they were getting a bit of mobile network.

One or two of them had a smartphone. The rest were excited to just be around. They watched videos on YouTube that took a while to buffer. They listened to music and even played Pub-G. The age of those boys would be 15 and above.

They had passed out of school. I didn't see a single girl with a smartphone in Dongari, the village.

In Dongari, where most people make their ends meet by toiling as laborers, even the smartphones costing not more than Rs. 10,000 are bought on installments. It is a luxury. And Dongari is merely one village.

In a state with a population of over ten crores, 9.4% are Adivasis and 12% are Dalits. This, a large part of that section of the society, has little internet literacy, and no resources to own a smartphone. They have more important things to worry about – like securing their next meal.

Yet, in a move that could potentially marginalise them further, the Maharashtra government's June 15 circular mentioned online education more than once. In the wake of coronavirus, where gatherings are supposed to be avoided and physical attendance in schools may not be possible, the state government wanted to ensure the students do not suffer academically.

Bhau Chaskar, a teacher and activist based in the town of Akole in Western Maharashtra, said it is nothing but a “digital partition”. He told me that those kids who are left behind because they cannot afford costly gadgets “could develop an inferiority complex.”

Besides students, even the teachers wondered how the online classes would work. The day I visited Palghar, a Zoom conference of teachers across Talasari taluka in Palghar had been arranged with the collector. One of the teachers who attended it told me how they struggled with the connection, which delayed the meeting by an hour.

But the teachers had to enforce what the state government had laid out. “We have a WhatsApp group of teachers where we receive PDF files or videos with necessary instructions and syllabus for kids,” Ravi Rakh, one of the teachers in Dongari told me. “We forward them to those who have a smartphone at home. We request the parents to make the smartphone available to the kids. They say yes, but it is not working out well.”

It is tough to imagine otherwise. Just 18.5 percent of rural households in Maha-

rashtra had any internet facility, according to the 2017-18 report of the National Sample Survey. And merely 1 in 6 people in rural Maharashtra had the “ability to use the Internet.” Among women, that number was 1 in 11.

The report further noted that only 1 in 7 people in rural Maharashtra had been able to use the internet in the 30 days prior to the survey. For women, that number further dwindled to 1 in 12.

One of those rare students was Anita Andhare, an 11-year old girl, who had familiarized herself a bit with her brother’s smartphone. She voiced some of the simplest and genuine concerns when I met her in Dongari. “I can’t imagine an online class. What if I have a query? If I raise my hand, would the teachers be able to spot it?” she asked.

What makes an online class further complicated is it requires the active participation of parents, who can’t afford to be at home to look after their kids. Especially after a lockdown where they have to make up for the two and a half months of lost wages.

Saddling the parents with the responsibility of ensuring the children are reading textbooks, or the PDFs they receive on WhatsApp, placed them in uncharted territory. “We have not studied much either,” Chandan, Anita’s mother told me. “We cannot tell whether they [the kids] are working properly or not. They would be better off at school.”

The teachers though are being apprehensive of re-starting school. They will be blamed if the children contract coronavirus, and said that there are other ways in which the state could have approached the impending academic year. The penetration of TV and Radio is far better in the hinterland of Maharashtra than smartphones. Chaskar said, “The state government should start a channel, where we can teach and get pupils involved in activities. For that, the state should prepare a workbook immediately. The [Maharashtra] circular mentions TV and Radio, but there is no planning on how we could use it.”

The thought of being left behind in these circumstances can mess with a teen’s mind. In the first week of June, a class 10 student in Kerala died by suicide because she did not have the resources to join an online class through TV or smartphone. However, the state government’s response was heartening.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced that Neighbourhood Study Centres would be set up for students that do not have access to smartphones, TV sets, or the internet. The state governments across the country could take some cues from Kerala.

The problems with online learning are not new. They are not insurmountable either. Yet, the fact that the establishment chooses to ignore them and go ahead with the idea of e-learning is a sign of our collective mindset. The marginalized students studying in some of the remotest areas have never been in our conscience. By our, I mean the civil society, media and, of course, the lawmakers. The imposition of online schools after lockdown is reflective of the apathy and indifference with which we have treated some of the poorest sections of the society before lockdown.

In early 2019, I ran a series of stories for People's Archive of Rural India on the condition of public schools, or Zilla Parishad schools, in Maharashtra, where the students mostly belong to the families of farmers and labourers struggling to stay afloat. The Zilla Parishads are district councils, which took over primary education in Maharashtra in 1961-62 to ensure that quality education doesn't remain a luxury of a select few. But successive state governments have neglected the schools and placed good quality education beyond the reach of the poor.

The neglect is evident in the data: In 2008-09, the amount allotted for school education was almost 18 percent of the total expenditure of the state government. In 2018-19, it was down to 12.68 percent, indicating a steady decline. The lack of budget reflects in the dilapidating infrastructure with several schools functioning even without proper toilet facilities.

Thousands of schools in Maharashtra operated without power as well because they hadn't been able to pay the electricity bills. The "e-learning" rooms created in these schools had computers and printers, in which dust was gathering. The teachers told me they took their students to nearby cafes instead to fill up the online scholarship forms.

This was early 2019. More than a year before the lockdown, when coronavirus was unheard of. The system had not succeeded in providing digital learning even in those circumstances.

The neglect and funds crunch has real outcomes. In 2009-10, ZP schools in the state had over 1.1 million students in Class 1. Eight years later, by 2017-18, there were only 123,739 students in Class 8 – that is, 89 percent of the students dropped out in between.

According to the Right to Information application I had filed, in 2017-18, around 4.6 million students were studying in 61,659 ZP schools in Maharashtra, which was down from nearly 6 million in 2007-08.

One of the major reasons why parents send their kids to ZP schools is the Mid Day Meal scheme, which takes care of the children's lunch six days a week, leaving parents with as many fewer meals to worry about.

When I met some of the teachers handling the Mid Day Meals of students, they said the state provides rice, food grains, oil, salt, and spices. The budget sanctioned by the state government for fuel and vegetables for one student up to Class 5 stood at Rs. 1.51 per day. For students between Classes 6-8, it was Rs. 2.17. Yes, you read that right.

Long story short: the students being deprived of education after we usher in the e-learning era haven't even been given proper meals and toilets. They have mostly studied in classrooms with a ceiling fan that does not work. We have been okay with it for all these years.

The indifference we subjected them to before the lockdown continues even in the discourse about the post-corona world. We simply don't care about them.



GANESH NATARAJAN

ECONOMY AFTER COVID-19: THE SILVER LININGS

In the beginning, there was just the flutter of the wings of a proverbial butterfly. In a distant city in China called Wuhan, a place few had heard of, reports of people falling sick, and a few deaths raised very few eyebrows. “Ah well” said some China watchers, “with the kind of stuff they eat there, such occurrences are expected. One hopes the people recover fast and learn their lesson!” And then the butterfly’s wings started a strong breeze in Italy as Chinese workers returned to work and brought with them the dreaded COVID-19. Then the tsunami truly hit the world as Spain, then Germany and France saw waves of COVID positives and quite a few deaths taking over the headlines of every news channel on the continent. Nearer home to China, Asian countries like Japan and

South Korea caught the bug briefly and seemed to have recovered. And then the unthinkable happened. After being dismissive about the virus initially, the mighty leaders of the old Empire, the UK, and the most powerful nation on earth, the USA realized that COVID-19 was no laughing matter. The Corona Virus, so-called because of its crowned look leading to the Latin word Corona as its colloquial name, began its dance of havoc and death, sparing neither the poorest of the poor nor the high and mighty with Princes and Prime Ministers testing positive to this affliction. India, after almost anecdotal beginnings, is now fighting a full-blown pandemic as indeed is nearly every nation on all the continents. And suddenly, the whole world is embroiled in a war that is certainly not of its choosing with every nation battling for life against the mightiest scourge since Spanish Flu and a story of devastation that can outrival World Wars I and II in its trail of death and destruction.

While the loss of life and pervasive sickness is the proximate worry for the world, the consequential damages of the widespread pandemic on the economic fortunes and business future of every country in the world cannot be over-emphasized. Recent studies estimate that the world GDP could decline by as much as 1.5 percent this year, and ILO points to a horrific number of over 250 million eligible people on the unemployment rolls by the end of this crisis. And while the initial response in the services sector in India to the first period of lockdown was one of positivity and a “we can do it” attitude, there is no doubt that the ugly specter of layoffs, furloughs, and salary cuts is not far away. Imagine then the plight of daily wage workers, migrant workers, and people supporting families in rural India. Are we staring at a 2021 where there will be unimaginable tragedies painted across our landscape?

Having said all that, there is one scenario that needs to be explored. Will our aspiration and rising ability to become a truly digital nation help us to sustain during the COVID crisis? Will we be a stronger and more competitive nation in the post-COVID era?

Digital India – The new realities

In India, there is both an opportunity and a threat, and we may be better prepared as a nation than many others to adopt the new narrative that digitalization presents, and emerge in the post COVID era as leaders in many segments. In the Prime Minister’s five trillion dollar economy plan, a one trillion dollar digital

economy plan had already been embedded, and many of us at NASSCOM in partnership with McKinsey & Co and the Ministry of Electronics and IT had collaborated to create a vision of a digital economy well before the dark shadows of COVID brought in the present clouds of despondency and uncertainty to all of us.

Digital India was just a dream a few years ago and given all the hype and hoopla in this period over political imbroglios, farmer stress and loan waivers, anaemic industrial growth, banking NPAs, e-commerce start-up failures and the alarming rise of joblessness in various sector of the economy, a cynical citizen could be forgiven for believing that all the missions we have heard about – Skills India, Start-Up India, Make in India and even Digital India will have to press a Reset button to have any hope of succeeding by the time India is 75 years old! But this would not do justice to several successes we have seen in the realm of digital and the real hope that many of us have that a digitally enabled India could be the secret sauce for cooking up a more optimistic future for many of our countrymen. The year when we see real results could well be 2021 with the experiences of digital transformation standing us in good stead for the challenges of rearchitecting the future.

The trillion-dollar digital economy mission encompasses not just the tech sector contributing three hundred billion dollars or more by 2025 but multiple sectors – healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, and education using the enabling power of the national optical fiber network and an array of digital technologies to transform product design, optimize processes and enable new consumer and citizen journeys. The good news is that India's pace of digital adoption has been among the best in the world with more than a quarter-billion Indians having gone online in the last five years and smartphone penetration which grew from six per hundred people in 2013 to twenty-three in 2017 expected to continue its breathtaking growth rate in the foreseeable future.

What gives even more confidence is the number of use cases that are emerging in key economic sectors that assure us that digital transformation is real and happening. Our own eco-system of entrepreneurial investments at 5F World with the thesis of “Digital for India” has seen seven profitable companies emerge, one each in History & Culture Tourism, Copper Artisan productivity improvement and market access, Farming product distribution and marketplace development, a sup-

ply chain and transportation platform and finally a Center for AI and Advanced Analytics, a digital platform for career management and skills for employees and aspiring graduates. We have seen companies – small medium and large systematically deploy digital and Industry 4.0 solutions and a host of technologies – from Augmented and Virtual Reality to Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data, and Predictive and Prescriptive Analytics to participate in a truly digital global eco-system. The success of this eco-system has attracted investments from companies in Tokyo, Los Angeles, and New York and is a true representation of the opportunities that lie ahead for players in digital India.

The Mckinsey report pointed out that while IT and IT Enabled Services, Electronics Manufacturing, E-Commerce, Telecom Services, and E-Payments would contribute half of the trillion-dollar digital economy, the other half would be made up of new and emerging digital eco-systems -digital product and service creation and delivery, smart grids and digital power distribution, e-marketplaces for private and government services and larger participation of shared economy players not just in transportation and hotel rooms but every segment of the services economy.

All this had already happened by the end of 2019, and the sudden challenge posed by COVID brought many of these capabilities to the test earlier than one could have anticipated. But the fact that we are indeed digitally ready can be explained by just three use cases from the service sector.

1. Hinduja Global Services: One of the top Business Process Management firms in India's 160-billion-dollar IT and BPM industry, HGS could move over 80 percent of its 40,000 people in seven countries to a "Work from Home" status in a week. And it reports that it is trying its best to recover the 20 % loss and serve the increasing demands of its global customers.

2. Global Talent Track: A leading skills provider for the IT, BPM, and Financial Services industry was able to move its training services of national and global customers to a 100 % Train from Home using an array of technologies to ensure that training processes were delivered with both synchronous and asynchronous pedagogical formats with little loss of learning effectiveness.

3. Pune City Connect: A unique Public-Private Partnership between the Pune

Municipal Corporation and the corporate sector in the city, with over eight thousand slum dweller youth engaged in digital literacy and skills development, PCC managed to move its entire processes within a week with no impact on learning and with the complete confidence of CSR donors,

Other services sectors too, beyond IT, skills, and livelihoods training have adopted digital technologies and continued to provide services. Banking, health-care, and even some modicum of e-commerce for food delivery have risen to the challenge and continued to serve the customer. And as the manufacturing sector comes out in phases from the lockdown, one can expect that manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, and supply chains will harness the power of digital technologies to restore the economic activity of the country while maintaining social distancing and all possible safeguards to protect human life.

Growing need for digital in COVID times

We have already seen examples of industries turning on a dime and moving their models from largely physically proximate to a majority “work from home” and only essential services from common spaces like offices. The digital technologies that have enabled this are clearly excellent communication, collaboration, and classroom technologies with Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom becoming normal tools for white-collar workers. Easy to navigate user interfaces and intuitive user experience have enabled this to happen seamlessly, and there are a host of other digital technologies which people had already started dabbling with which will become mainstream as the country and the world during the coming months of V-shaped and U-shaped recoveries which could extend through a long summer and who knows, even through a part of the autumn and winter.

First, let’s look at sectors where there will be little recovery in the short term and see how digital could impact them. The travel industry, particularly discretionally leisure travel internationally, is down for the count and will take down with it the hospitality and tourism sectors. If there is a role for technology, it will be to enable virtual reality showcases and experiences of places we may have wanted to visit and will now have to be satisfied exploring on a computer, supported by excellent 3D imagery and some levels of interactivity. Sectors like infrastructure, construction, and real estate can also get little relief from digital capabilities and will have to wait until both labor and equipment can be used. Related sectors like cement and steel are bound to suffer too. Retail except for some stray bright spots in e-

commerce has been badly hit by the lack of discretionary demand and manufacturing, having closed entirely in the lockdown has also seen contract labor vanish back to the rural homes they came from. Can a limited opening of the economy with a reduced labor force and the need to respect social distancing norms enable anything like a full return to production capacity utilization- one does not think so.

Back to the impact of digital in the lockdown and the slow limping back to normalcy that is expected for India. There will be a definite increase in the adoption of cloud computing with software, platforms, and infrastructure as a service becoming the norm, and mobile solutions for search, access, and commercial transactions are moving mainstream, adopted by almost every citizen. Gaming, online entertainment, and all forms of education, learning, and enlightenment are becoming the norm, and the use of both voice and e-mail response service centers have increased as people search for all kinds of answers to escape the drudgery of life within the four walls of their homes. Cybersecurity and fraud detection are becoming necessary with the plethora of dubious information and claims flowing through people's phones and other screens.

The post COVID world

The “new normal” that the world will wake up to in phases July onwards will be one where people are a lot more self-sufficient and very comfortable with omnipresent technology support rather than reliance on one's workplace colleagues and neighbors to solve problems and answer queries. Consumers will be comfortable doing most of their searches, comparisons, and buying decisions without seeing merchandise, college, and even school students will happily rely on e-learning and assisted learning solutions to increase their knowledge, and teachers will also start preparing more rigorously for classes. Banks and other financial services will almost entirely stay online, and a visit to a physical outlet will become a rarity.

In the world of manufacturing, adoption of Industry 4.0 and Smart Manufacturing, with the use of robotics, digital twinning, augmented, and virtual reality will become the order of the day, and the employment potential in the Indian manufacturing industry will lessen even more.

Livelihoods will continue to be created in healthcare, retail, logistics, and distribution, but in all cases, supported and enabled by big data management, predictive and prescriptive analytics. The secret to success in the creation of a digitally

enabled India is not to rush in with digital technologies without preparing the processes and culture for the assimilation of new ideas and capabilities. In every manufacturing company, from the very large to the micro SME, it has been seen time and time again that spraying IoT sensors on the shop floor is no formula to ensure smart manufacturing. It is important to build a data usage culture and move from a descriptive post mortem analysis of production and maintenance to a predictive and eventually prescriptive capability for shop floor output, supply and demand chain responsiveness, customer buying behavior, and employee willingness to be digitally responsive. The interplay of cyber with physical, whether it is humans working with robots or artificial intelligence used as an assistive and augmenting tool rather than for autonomous AI replacing humans, mixed reality – augmented and virtual capabilities to enhance production and warehousing productivity and “digital twins” to model every process and simulate outcomes before putting it into large scale deployment are all capabilities which the fourth industrial revolution is demanding. The very same principles, with some necessary tweaks, can transform agriculture, healthcare, logistics, and enable the true creation of e-Government and smart cities and villages across the length and breadth of the country.

Even the social sector is seeing the value of digital technology deployment, and impact investment monies are seeking the intersection of technology and social upliftment to fund new models of development. With the connectivity and bandwidth improving across the country and the world, even youth and children in rural areas and urban slums will start using technology more and more. We already saw the alacrity with which municipal schools and skills centers migrated to online learning in our own non-profit Pune City Connect, and there is no cause for concern that adoption by the poor will be any less than in affluent urban populations of the country.

In an increasingly digital world, what will get reduced is the joy of human contact, the casual conversations between friends in a carefree world, the scale of weddings, festivals, and family gatherings, and the sheer joy of being part of a loving community. One can only hope that the sharp scythe of remote technologies will not make human emotions turn cold, and someday soon, the world will return to being the loving and inclusive place we have all wanted it to be!



SEEMA PATHAK

COVID-19 AND THE LIVED REALITY OF ASHA WORKERS

Covid-19 is posing an unprecedented crisis for the entire world. Humanity's existence is itself under threat. As a grassroots health worker, I am watching this global pandemic very closely, and it seems impossible to be rid of its effects on our society any time soon.

I am an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) facilitator, and my main responsibility is to help ASHA workers in their work, organize meetings, and ensure that initiatives like vaccination are impactful. In the last three months, the Corona epidemic has spread from cities to villages. This has affected our work and responsibilities to a great extent. The entire department is fighting the Covid-19 after indefinitely postponing a lot of routine jobs.

We could have never guessed about the present situation. When I was appointed in the year 2011, the situation was such that there was hardly any work, and I used to wonder why the Government paid me so much money for such little work, but now we have to work day and night.

Field Work and COVID-19 Infection

I have been working as an ASHA facilitator for the last 10 years and have been managing the vaccination work as well as house to house visits, but the entire system has gone haywire for the last three months. We are not able to meet regularly anymore, and the vaccination work has also stopped to a great extent. I am working with ASHA workers, and they need to go from house to house for all kinds of surveys, but ever since COVID -19 has come to light, they are trying to avoid doing house to house surveys because they do not have the necessary resources to protect themselves.

On normal days, we used to give health-related advice to people in the community centers and at the Panchayat level, counsel pregnant women, and training about how to take care of new-borns was also carried out here, but women have stopped coming to the center because of COVID-19. Everyone is fearful of being infected by Corona.

There are other challenges too. We have to go to the houses of daily wage workers who have come from another place to ask about their well-being, but we are afraid that our families too might be at risk in case there is even one person who is infected. To help understand this better, let me share my routine.

My day begins at 6 in the morning. Every day by 8, I call all twenty ASHA workers working under me and ask them to go and see all the patients in their wards and give a report on the phone. After this, at 9 'O clock, I go to some wards myself for inspection and then go back to the office. The meeting in the office normally lasts for 2-3 hours. I then take the report from all ASHA workers and send it to the office. This is my routine for each day.

Our current responsibility

We have regular Block level meetings to fight Corona, and we work as per the directions of the Block medical superintendent. Presently, we are required to look

after those people who have come from outside and are under home quarantine. Our duty includes calling the doctor to take care in case they have any health-related issues. Alongside we are also fulfilling the responsibility of making the due-list. Polio drops have to be given in the coming few weeks, and ASHA workers are busy with this task as per plan.

Impact of COVID-19 on rural life

Coronavirus is showing its effect on life in the villages. Workers who have come from outside are under home quarantine, but there is a feeling of suspicion towards them, and there is an atmosphere of fear related to them even after they have completed the quarantine period. As such, they are not able to roam around freely in the village.

What after COVID-19?

It is unlikely that Coronavirus will leave us any time soon. There are still many diseases that we are struggling with and have not been able to eradicate them fully despite having vaccines for them. Whether it is HIV or TB, many patients are still dying of these diseases. So even if the Corona vaccine finally comes, its challenges will not end soon. Looking at the corona pandemic, the Government can also work in the direction of building people's immunity. Awareness regarding diet and health can be spread more widely through ASHA workers. Looking at emergency facilities or the epidemic, arrangements at Primary and Community health Centres can also prove to be helpful. Groundworkers can also be asked to look after old people besides children. The Government can use its own resources, especially for those old people who have no one to take care of them.

Covid-19 and Technology

Covid-19 has increased our dependence on technology. Earlier, we used to take a hard copy of daily reports and all other records, but after the spread of Corona, we started doing all this work on WhatsApp through their mobile phones. ASHA workers send pictures during home visits in their wards, which we further send via WhatsApp to the primary health Centre. This technology has helped us a great deal in our work in the time of Corona. We keep connected with our office through phone or call. Paperless work has risen, but the increase in the use of technology has disadvantages too. It is common knowledge that ASHA workers are normally less educated or barely literate. Many of them come from very low-income families, and they do not have smartphones, whereas many who might

possess smartphones do not know how to use them.

These women can neither take a photograph nor use WhatsApp without help. Thus it is difficult for them to enter the digital world. Earlier we could meet personally and help the ASHA workers to prepare a report and sometimes even do their work, but now due to Corona, we are not able to meet, and ASHA workers have to face these challenges alone.

The most backward section of society was not ready for the demands made by technology during the time of the corona pandemic. Women are still very backward when it comes to technology, and we cannot imagine the use of the uninterrupted flow of technology without digital training. Using Corona as a stepping stone, we need to learn to connect with the digital world, so we can combat difficulties that lie ahead. Using it as an opportunity, more and more women need to be connected to technology.

Making ground workers technologically accomplished is a challenge

In conclusion, to become technologically accomplished is filled with huge challenges for those working on the ground, like ASHA, and Anganwadi workers. Their first challenge is that most of their families do not earn enough to be able to buy a smartphone. So the Government needs to give this some thought. The second challenge is that it is not easy to understand the complexities of technology. Proper training for a few weeks would be required.

This piece was originally written in Hindi by Ms. Pathak and has been translated verbatim.



DURGA RAGHUNATH

THE RISE OF THE ESSENTIAL COMPANY

Caveat 1: Given that we are still nowhere near the beginning of the end of the curve, all predictions are premature.

Caveat 2: While I track e-commerce and media companies, I loathe to make generalizations. I am, therefore, liberally using examples from a company that I know well. Please read these examples as illustrations of a larger point, rather than an attempt to paint one company as the personification of perfection.

10 June 2020: In the last 100 days, survival has boiled down to one fundamental question -- what is essential and what is not.

This distinction is so basic that it has had an existential effect on everything, digital or otherwise, that we see around us. Demand and supply get flattened significantly in moments like this. As a consequence, what is necessary and right unify to present an obvious operational path.

For a technology-run marketplace this translates into a single problem statement – how can we use technology and our marketplace to have the greatest possible impact right now?

In my one-and-a-half years at Zomato, we have thought of this at discrete points of time, and have done several small things that enabled this purpose. Some examples include the introduction of real-time tips for delivery partners, tags that highlighted LGBTQIA-friendly restaurants, food hygiene ratings as well as a focused business, the UCO (used cooking oil) collection program to prevent the recirculation of used cooking oil in the market. All these efforts are product and business reactions to a problem that we saw around us.

However, the unexpected and brutal onslaught of COVID-19 has made most e-commerce companies painfully aware in one collective moment that users are not turning to them for the delight of consumption or shopping but out of desperation.

The question at such perilous times facing “essential” companies is this: what is the form of our most essential contribution?

What is Essentialism

During a Pandemic, everything comes to a stand-still. We’ve read about it in history, but have now had the rare opportunity to see it first-hand. At that moment, when an entire sector is defined as “essential” – companies in that sector are forced to examine what this really means.

There are three stages to this realization –

First, of the moment: when companies immediately see that they simply must do what they do in the best possible way they can. For a food delivery start-up that meant delivering food in the safest possible way.

The Focus on Safety

Safety has always been a term relegated to personal choices, natural disasters, or high-risk activities. Simpler has always meant safer, for what can go wrong is more obvious. Complex systems have inherently more connected things and more scenarios that are unpredictable and hard to fix.

Today when we think of safety in the business context – companies want their employees to be safe and Work From Home. However, in the context of the food ecosystem, there are three additional things to think about – safety during meal prep, the safety of delivery and safety of users.

With over 80 million worldwide loyal monthly active users, a food platform like Zomato has a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to enable new behaviors. Safe hygiene is one of them. Here are a few examples prompted by the spread of COVID 19 that will likely become permanent behaviors in the future.

1. Features – within a week of the news about Covid-19 breaking out, technology was set up to enable both users and delivery partners to opt-for “contactless delivery.” While placing an order as well as while waiting for an order, the user was urged to opt for this method of accepting their food. Once confirmed, the delivery partner left the food on a table outside the users’ premises and sent them a picture on the app. This continues today as the 'MAX Safety program' – an 8-step approach to safety in the food supply chain.

2. Communication – Marketplaces communicate a lot – with their users, with their suppliers, and their delivery agents. Each channel has a dedicated app interface that allows for communication several times in a day. Every communication over the last 90 days has underlined masks. Whether a chef, a user, or a delivery partner every participant in this food chain has received a minimum of 90 messages on Masks and hygiene.

Second, of extending the moment

How a company defines 'essential' is as much a question of survival as it is a search for a deeper and broader impact. This often means not the core service you offer (delivery) but a broader use of capability – if a platform delivers food that is essential, can it also deliver grocery? The beauty of marketplaces is that they can activate supply when there is demand reasonably easily. So, enabling grocery shops like you do restaurants (while with different nuances) is possible. Given

Zomato has users and delivery partners in over 550 cities, activating delivery of groceries on scale was a necessary and possible evolution of the moment.

The broadening of essentialism

An image that will stay with most Indians for years to come will be of migrants walking back to their villages and towns. Every city with over 5 million population and with some sort of infrastructure and industrial activity has witnessed this exodus.

What was previously considered 'Corporate Social Responsibility' has now become the individual responsibility of every person who is more privileged to give back to those less privileged.

Post-COVID all public numbers that are available have shown that users are spending more time on social media and e-commerce. In the future, this is likely to translate to a more than 50% increase in spending on e-commerce platforms. This behavior presents a substantial opportunity for consumer internet brands to reach out to their user base to enlist their time and financial support for their sustained participation in a more equitable society.

There have been several efforts in the past (primarily floods) when Feeding India, Zomato's not for profit arm, has raised funds to be deployed to vulnerable areas. This effort involves activating a donate experience within the Zomato app to enable users to give specifically to disaster-hit areas.

With the tech already in place, overnight Zomato was able to launch the "Feed the Daily Wager" program and over a period of two weeks raised over INR 1 cr. Today through Feed the Daily Wager, so far, we have distributed more than 6.5 lakh ration kits in more than 20 cities.

As I write this, the program has collected through digital donations over INR 33 Crore and continues to look to raise funds from every quarter. Besides this, Zomato also urges users to donate two rupees with every order for the Feeding India effort. With this comes a culture of daily corporate responsibility to society and transparency to the user via emailers, blog posts, and quarterly reports.

And third, of coming out of it

No company that survives these 6-12 months (we are in month 4) is ever going to be the same again. Employees and management have learnt one of the hardest lessons of their professional and personal existence. But to take essentialism a step forward would be to go back to focusing on where contribution can be the greatest. Whether employees, a development team, or an entire company – understanding where that point of highest value lies will become the new essential.

The secret sauce of most mature e-commerce companies is that they work. Users use them frequently and see value in them, suppliers and vendors believe they have changed their small business and delivery partners believe they now have financial security of a different order.

As we endure this period, the vulnerability of all that is around us had made us all more aware, concerned, and collaborative. The unconventional actions of start-ups that are nimble have not gone unnoticed by users. I, for one, hope that this period of survival will build some of the lasting companies in India.

In closing, I sincerely hope the following happens:

1. Tech companies understand the power that they have in galvanizing users and their ecosystems for good and make it a systemic everyday part of their user journeys
2. Tech companies value their delivery partners disproportionately more – they are the true differentiated forces of our flywheels
3. Tech companies become the Good Companies of our collective Indian future – showing the way – protecting employees, partners, and users in this journey towards a more truthful, impactful, and equitable existence



MADANMOHAN RAO

CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE TIMES OF CORONA VIRUS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Transparency, timeliness, trust, tenacity, and togetherness are key values during a crisis.

As the pandemic engulfs us, it is important for individuals, organizations, and nations to come up with appropriate resilience approaches, which include communications and outreach. The world of digital media throws up interesting opportunities – and challenges – in this regard.

On the one hand, the internet and smartphones open up real-time access to

breaking news from around the world and rich visualizations of this data. On the other hand, there is information overload – and even worse, fake news and hate speech.

In this article, I present nine tips for organizations to understand the crisis landscape and engage with internal teams as well as external stakeholders. This involves internal communication, public messaging strategy, and digital transformation.

A more compact approach to explain these tips would be the ‘3 S’ framework: sensing, sensemaking, and sensitizing. In other words, people need to gather news from all their senses, interpret and contextualize it, and act in a manner that ameliorates the situation instead of causing more harm.

1. Anatomy of a crisis

Crises are of different causes, dimensions, and scope, and it helps to begin by researching and mapping out the landscape of the crisis. Some are internally caused (e.g., product defect); others are external in nature (e.g., infections from overseas). Some have a domestic impact; others are global in footprint.

Some crises affect specific communities; others target the public at large. Each of these dimensions will define the information landscape, crisis team composition, and communication plans. For example, larger crises will require external inputs from an advisory board.

The COVID-19 crisis is a classic example of a crisis that needs to be tackled at the level of the individual, family, community, organization, city, state, nation, and even multilaterally.

2. Mapping the information landscape

Unfortunately, in addition to breaking news at a time of crisis, there can be an alarming volume of fake news, misinformation, hate speech, and unsubstantiated rumors. Crisis analysis begins by separating authoritative sources from dubious ones.

Principles of knowledge management help classify content into data, information, and knowledge. With news breaking all the time, it is important to

update responsive guidelines and procedures to keep them accurate and relevant.

The design of information plays an important role. Visualization of scenarios in a manner which is understandable for a wide range of audience is crucial. Visualization tools, graphic design, interactive charts, dashboards, and animations are needed to help make sense of the information.

3. Understanding the media

Every organization should be in charge of its own digital information presence, and also learn how to engage with the media. Major traditional media generally have influence and authority, but also have been known to make errors and reveal underlying biases; hence ‘media literacy’ is an important competence.

Social media are a rich platform for the ‘people’s voice’ and also another major channel for traditional media. Social media monitoring and outreach call for an understanding of the different ‘personalities’ and cycles of various types of social media.

In the case of coronavirus, Twitter has been useful for immediately tracking breaking news and reactions. Facebook and Instagram have added a social community angle to solidarity efforts, and LinkedIn has provided a professional touch via shared presentations on topics like working from home.

In countries like India, some TV news organizations have been overly sensationalistic and have been accused of hatemongering in some cases. Other media, fortunately, have been more balanced and sober in their coverage.

4. The crisis communication team

Though plans may continually change, it is important to have a crisis communication team in place to manage and plan messaging, online resources, and other activities. The organizational leader and spokespersons should be the core of this team, but organization-wide support and inputs are also needed.

Communication with internal and external stakeholders should be at regular intervals (e.g., every morning or evening), along with additional emergency announcements as relevant. Sensing, sensemaking, and articulation should be carried out in a systematic manner.

Communication channels for strategic communication should be prioritized. Eventually, the aim should be to expand from responsive communication to proactive engagement. For example, many corporates and large NGOs in India have dedicated spokespersons, along with the CEO or MD. They announce their plans concerning activities like CSR funds or community relief campaigns.

In the case of smaller organizations, the founder communicates with employees and customers. Internal teams and peer communities assist them.

5. Values and qualities: “The Five T's”

Crisis communication in terms of messaging and archived resources should have the following core qualities and values captured in the “Five T's” – transparency, timeliness, trust, tenacity, and togetherness.

Transparency is key to crisis communication. Data should not be fudged, manipulated, or hidden. Timeliness is important in an era when the news is breaking at all hours, from all over the world.

Trust must be cultivated among internal and external stakeholders; otherwise, the organization may not command the desired influence, authority, or decisions. Tenacity is also called for; some crises may drag on for months or even years, and the toughness required for the long haul must be clearly communicated.

Everyone has the potential to be a leader, and everyone’s opinion and action count. In a 24x7 interconnected world, it is only through collaboration and co-creation across the board that responses can be effective at scale.

Unfortunately, not all government sources of information have been fully transparent. There has also been distrust between the central government and some states.

6. Media engagement

For key announcements and even for regular communication, organizations must understand how to engage with the media. This can range from physical/virtual press conferences to group/individual interviews.

Helplines should be well-staffed to give accurate and timely responses to the

media and to the public, and online helpdesks should be informative, easily searchable, and accurate. Websites and social media channels should cultivate the right kind of authoritative and trustworthy persona.

While many state governments in India regularly briefed their citizens about the coronavirus outbreak, the central government has not engaged with the citizens as often as other countries or even some of the Indian states. The Prime Minister has still not addressed a single press conference.

Fortunately, many government websites provide official and authoritative information. Apps have been released by the central government and some states as well, with news, guidelines, and tracking information. Issues of privacy and security of citizen data are still being debated.

7. Communicating with the broader ecosystem

Civil society and religious organizations should be engaged for effectively communicating key messages. Celebrities can also be harnessed for getting buy-in from fans and broader communities.

Messaging should appeal to higher emotions of love and kindness, and not baser ones of hate and cruelty. There should be a blend of practical and philosophical, informational, and inspirational. Messages sent out must be regularly assessed for impact and modified in the future as necessary.

8. Storytelling

Crisis communication calls for calmness, seriousness, simplicity, and empathy. In addition to data points and scientific research, they should showcase exemplary stories of compliance, innovation, and excellence (as well as illustrations of how not to do certain things).

Testimonials and ‘hero’ stories evoke empathy and respect. Humour and art are important elements here, but care and contextualization should be adopted to avoid offending people. Errors and mistakes should be eliminated via thorough verification, proof-reading, and testing, to avoid damage to reputation and credibility.

For example, stories of Indian NGOs who have been feeding hungry children,

volunteering to care for the elderly, and looking after abandoned animals have gone viral on social media. Stories of students who have come up with designs for affordable masks and even frugal ventilator components have become popular as well.

9. Digital transformation

One of the larger impacts of the current COVID-19 crisis is the acceleration of digital transformation in organizations, which impacts everything from crisis communication to regular workflow. On a scale of 1 to 10, organizations should be assessing the accuracy and value of their stakeholder data, impact initiatives, marketing collaterals, sales campaigns, websites, and social media channels.

This extends to internal workflow as well as interactions with partners and donors. From this initial baseline, maturity curves and success factors should be drawn up for improving digital performance in the long run. This is the future of work and has already arrived in the present.

The bigger picture

Forecasts still vary for how long it will take for health indicators to return to normal, and when the economy will recover. Interestingly, some sectors of the creative industry are doing well (e.g., digital entertainment) while others have been dealt a body blow and may take six months to a year to recover (e.g., travel, restaurants, cinema halls).

There is certainly plenty of new work these days, but a lot of it is voluntary or free, e.g., designs for affordable masks, apps for health info, food distribution initiatives. It may take up to a year and a half or two for testing, tracking, tracing, treating, and vaccination to become so widespread and effective that full citizen confidence returns to earlier levels.

Sectors that are doing relatively well during the coronavirus crisis revolve around digital workflow and transformation (e.g., videoconferencing, collaboration), online entertainment (e.g., games, movies), e-learning (education and corporate training), and e-commerce (delivery of food, medicines). Services that are in demand include wellness (online yoga, counseling), legal (contracts, risk management), and essential utilities (repair of electrical equipment).

Emerging from lockdown does not mean an immediate return to business-as-

usual. The real challenges still lie ahead, and the government will play a key role in rebuilding the nation as we confront the ‘new normal.’ Entrepreneurs and NGOs will need to proactively form alliances with governments to revive sectors like health, agriculture, and industry.

Non-governmental organizations will need to work around their aversion to perceived bureaucracy, politics, or corruption. This will include co-creation for product design, communication campaigns, service design, digital media, maker-spaces, and open-source design.

Humanity (and indeed, all species) has faced and weathered a range of crises throughout history. The crisis of today is the preparatory ground for the crisis of tomorrow, and organizations must have effective knowledge management practices, digital infrastructure, and a culture of proactive engagement not just to survive but revive and thrive.

In sum, despite immediate hardships, a crisis is a messenger and should be framed as an opportunity for reflection, reinvention, and digital transformation.



**ABUSALEH SHARIFF
AND AMIT SHARMA**

UNDERSTANDING THE PANDEMIC & CREATING EQUITABLE, FORMAL, & MEASURABLE EMPLOYMENT

It has now been a few months since India has experienced the onset and massive spread of Coronavirus across the nation despite a four-stage lockdown with differentiated levels of success temporally and regionally. Mistakenly, however, the Indian populace considered lockdown, social distancing, and quarantine as the ultimate strategy to contain the virus; yet this has proved to be an expensive way of policy learning.

Ironically, India opened up during a phase when the Covid-19 affliction is at its highest. It is far too widespread and has seen a considerable number of deaths. It is instructive to note as this article is written, India has surpassed China in the

total number of positives, notwithstanding low levels of credibility in numbers provided in both countries.

In India, it appears that the spread is slow but certain especially since the lockdown restrictions are meek and the millions of possible virus carriers are now spread all over rural India through mass-return migration of unorganized, manual laborers.

Some projections suggest that up to 50¹ percent of the world's population will get infected and with huge fatalities, which are not quantified yet. So far, Belgium² has recorded the highest fatality rate of 16.4%, followed by France-15.6%.³ Note that there are no robust estimations of the case-fatality rates at all, although the above ones are indicative.

India finally reached a relaxation of the lockdown through stepwise geographic as well as temporal steps. The lockdown imposed at a four-hour notice appears to have happened under international pressure. This is a delayed response, the first case in India was observed in January 2020, and the lockdown was brought about on 25th March! Precious time has been lost mainly due to political considerations of enacting a communal riot and providing red-carpet welcome to United States President Trump in Ahmedabad, India.

Success or failure in dealing with this calamity has to be gauged through the number of tests per million population (TMP). While the global average is difficult to assess, many large countries have reached 2000 TMP and above, such as the USA, Britain, but India is not even in the top 50. A government of India website provides data on TMP, which was about 20 in March, increasing to just about 230 in April 2020, while Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal's latest proportion is 51 and 25, respectively.⁴

Yet, one finds only a marginal improvement in the number tests per million – only 58⁵ test per million in India (total test only 2404267⁶ as on 19th May), compared with 35903 per million in the USA, now as I write this article the 'top corona-country of the world' with 1515300 tested positive and over 90000 confirmed deaths. On this date, India reports about 100000 positive and over 3000 confirmed deaths!

Case Fatality Rate (percent death to total tested positive) calculated using data as on 19th May, 2020 EST (USA) - Belgium 16.4; France 15.6; United Kingdom 14.2; Italy 14.2; India 3.1; USA 6.0. Globally the coronavirus pandemic has sickened more than 4712766⁷ people, according to official counts. As of today (19th May, 2020) at least 315850⁸ people have died, and the virus has been detected in at least 188⁹ countries.

Do these numbers suggest that India is a successful nation or a nation with more opaque data and numbers than even China?

Contagion Effects

Experts' understanding of how the virus spreads is still limited, but there are four factors that likely play a role:

1. how close one gets to another;
2. how long one is near the other person;
3. whether that person projects viral droplets on you, and
4. how much one touches one's own face

Let us discuss a macro picture of the first and crucial factor – distance between people. Population density is a major determinant of the distance between one person and another. India is 19th in the world in terms of population density of 414 persons per sq. kilometre, next only to Bangladesh and South Korea, but note that India is a nation of over 1.36 billion people.

Further, ten of the top one hundred urban concentrations in the world are in India. Also, five Indian urban population density concentrations are on top of the world list, with the highest 32,303 people per sq. Kilometre in Mumbai, followed by Kolkata (24,306), Gurugram, Howrah, and Ghaziabad. Therefore, India is characteristically in the high-risk category, and it will not be easy to keep 4 to 6 feet distance between people, rather it will be difficult even to keep a two feet distance between two unknown individuals. It is no surprise then that Mumbai is the worst affected city in India.

The second dimension of population congestion is within the living quarters. India not only has small housing space per individual but also a higher incidence of joint family living and living in community-based quarters such as labour camps of unskilled manual laborers attached to factories and production sites.

The chawl system in Mumbai is another example of an overpopulated living quarter in urban spaces.

The Third dimension is of India's distance within the community: urban ward, Mohalla, and village on the one hand and crowded goods and services markets on the other. These last two high population density spaces or distances act as multipliers to the first two. Lockdown has only shifted the markets into back alleys, which are streaming like fish markets and a swarm of customers, and authorities, including police, have turned a blind eye so far as the main roads are visually empty and quiet.

India's health-seeking behavior is unique. Culturally Indians are biased against women, children, and the elderly, especially in seeking timely and appropriate health care. It is observed that elderly parents are often pushed out of the main dwellings. This can be due to multiple reasons – such as shortage of dwelling space, inability to provide safe and separate space for sick when others at home need spots for homework, entertainment, safe storage, and so on. This behavior will aggravate the fast spread of pandemic as the street level interaction of such elderly sick will increase many folds.

Does India have all it takes to contain this pandemic?

India is basically caught between a 'rock and a hard place'. It has no policy options which are sure to yield results. What is lacking in India is accurate data. The testing is so low one has no clue as to the measure of incidence and impact. Even in normal times, India's health infrastructure is rather rudimentary and totally iniquitous. The doctor-population ratio is 1:1800 – and doctors are accredited based on formal education, including an allopathic and a vast variety of indigenous protocols that constitute over fifty percent of total numbers.

Similarly, India records a 1:500 ratio of nurses, but they are not the trained nurses that we find in hospitals; they are barely trained workers 'Accredited Social Health Activists' (popularly known as ASHA workers) and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs). The weakest of all is the population-Hospital bed ratio, which is one of the least in the world- only 0.7 beds per 1000 population, while the international benchmark is three beds per thousand.

Many romanticize a few (true and/or imagined) India specific traits such as “Indians have strong immunity”; and “tropical weather/high temperatures will kill the pandemic germs; pandemic is mostly urban occurrence and rural areas are safe and so on. These and similar explanations are but false expectations mostly leading to the fast spread of the pandemic.

A centralized approach to address this pandemic is necessary but not adequate. It is not enough that some major hospitals in cities are earmarked to deal with this pandemic. Every local private physician, health worker, pharmacy, and drug store must be converted into a testing center. A referral system with this vast a private and informal sector must be networked to identify, evaluate, undertake primary tests, and act as the first point of referral.

How can this be done soon must be discussed amongst the apex body of expert epidemiologists, civil society, and, of course, the politicians. The IT sector can play its part through some rudimentary but easy to use applications for self-checks, and diagnostics which can be geographically plotted in real-time.

Millions of unorganized laborers have been left with no choice but to embark for their home towns mostly because their living spaces, often provided by companies in their backyards, are now closed also due to the lockdown. It was in fact, very easy to monitor the emergence of virus if testing had been arranged on those very sites. Images of vast swathes of humanity walking on the road without food and water can only mean one thing- a multi-pronged calamity is in the making. India is likely to see a large number of deaths due to disease hunger and malnutrition sooner than later.

Government Employment Creation Essential for Post Covid-19 Recovery and Reconstruction

India today is under a hybrid lockdown 5.0 and has completed over 60 days of economic and social activity paralysis, causing billions of rupees worth of GDP loss and millions facing the risk of hunger, with expected doubling or even trebling of malnutrition amongst the vulnerable, especially youth and women.

It did not take long to realize that the unplanned and ‘one-size-fits-all’ type lockdown, confinement, and quarantine affected people, communities, and regions differently. Being a vast country with high regional diversity and socially plu-

realistic populace, India faces unique and complicated difficulties that cannot be addressed through knee-jerk public policy actions and prescriptions. Crowding amongst the poor living in crowded and dilapidated dwellings in urban peripheries and slums is the cause of extended and 'domesticated' spread of Covid-19. As on May 21st, 2020, the Covid-19 projections show continuing leaner increase in positive cases and associated death until July 2020 and beyond.

The contagious risk factor varied across economic and social class as did the public response. Limiting inter-state movement of migrant labor and encouraging the targeting and isolation of Muslims are just two of innumerable examples of discriminatory government policies. The intra-Covid period messaging from the Prime Minister failed to address such desperate situations and continually favored a pro-rich discourse. Even the much-touted 20-minute interval hand washing is a luxury in India, let alone use of hand sanitizers, which are unknown amongst the populace.

Soon enough, reality hit home. It was the poor, the inter-state migrant labor, the slum dwellers, the road-side beggars, the sex workers, the street vendors, the road-side chaiwaalas, the cycle rickshaw pullers who were hit worst by Coronavirus. The sudden lockdown robbed them of daily income, making them insecure and hungry. Grains supposed to be supplied free through government networks did not reach millions of migrant workers, many of who routinely 'pawn' as security their entitlement documents.

The economy is surely in depression, and up to 30 percent of the GDP loss is expected; note this is not just a decline in the GDP growth rate rather a decline in the total pool of GDP. Most of this loss will be distributed to the masses through an unprecedented increase in unemployed youth amongst the informal and undocumented manual labor, slum dwellers, ragpickers, and so on. The immediate reconstruction, therefore, must, (a) mitigate immediate hunger caused by lack of access to food due to cash shortfalls and improper food entitlements; and (b) generate an entirely fresh form of employment so that the needy can quickly get connected to the new structure of economic revival.

Creating Direct Public Employment

The Financial stimulus offered by the union government and the Reserve Bank of India is timely, but it would take many months, possibly years to see its positive

impact. Post-Covid-19 markets and demand structure would be different from the pre-Covid period due to a deep decline in disposable income and postponement of market purchases and investments. The manufacturing, farming, and trading sectors will not look familiar.

The large manufacturing and distribution companies are bound to amend production, distribution, and pricing structures. It appears that the days for universal income transfer have arrived, and more MGNREGA type entitlements must be created for the urban labor force as well. Yet such macro and unspecified employment alone cannot absorb all unemployed, the union and state governments must, therefore, generate direct employment on a war footing.

Such direct employment generation will ultimately get tagged on to the 'economic stimulus' efforts through the choice of sectors and sub-sectors (3-digit codes) of employment. However, the suggested direct employment generation cannot be made available to the applicants using the standard 'government employment criteria' such as based on reservation policy and other similar schemes which were evolved during the routine and growing economic situation. This current methodology deals with the sudden unemployment shock generated by Covid-19.

This unprecedented adversity will require unprecedented solutions. Any public employment policy must consider both the direct and indirect impact of this calamity.

The new methodology must account for incorporating Covid-19 impact as well as regional and family vulnerabilities in providing public employment. The state must create formal and measurable employment during the post-pandemic reconstruction (PPR) period. Two issues must be considered immediately- first, identifying appropriate sectors of the economy where employment must be generated, and second fair policy on design and methodology through which the recruits will be selected and employed.

The normal regular state-level employment policies do not address equality and coverage issues in a pluralistic society. Since the pandemic has affected varied types of people and communities differently, the standard public employment policy will not help and may even be unjust and iniquitous.

The Proposed Public Employment Indexing Methodology

Therefore, the following formula is suggested which is easy to use. Create a batch of applications say 30 in number: Use the following indexing criteria to create an order of merit amongst the 30 competitors:

Weightage Formula Government Job Applicants for Post Covid-19 Reconstruction

| Indicator | Marks/ weightage |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Vulnerability of family (dependency ratio) | 10 for each dependent member |
| Vulnerability of family (economic condition) | 30 for bottom of BPL 20 for BPL 10 for EWS |
| Per earning household member died of Covid 19 | 10 |
| If all earning members of household died of Covid 19 | 1 job for sure |
| Education | 15 for graduate+ 12 for Matric+ 10 for Below matric |
| Experience & skill | 1 for each year of experience |
| Gender | 0 for male 5 for female |

TABLE 1

The idea is to create equal geographic as well as community spread of new jobs created by the local/ state government. The idea is to create equal geographic as well as community spread of new jobs created by the local/ state government.

The following recommendations must be taken into consideration:

1. Maximum one job can be given to one family.
2. One job for sure must be given to families which lost all its earning members due to Covid-19 outbreak.
3. Higher weight for higher education and higher experience as shown in Table 1
4. To provide assistance to vulnerable families, 10 marks be given for each dependent member in the family. 30 Marks for applicants coming from poorest of the poor families (Antodaya), 20 for BPL and 10 for EWS category candidates
5. In an event of death of some (but not all) earning members because of Covid 19 outbreak, a total of 10 marks given to job applicants for each deceased earning member.
6. Much higher (difference in) weight given to vulnerable and Covid 19 victim families than to education and skills.
7. Females get 5 marks extra for female quota
8. Jobs must be created in such a way that the competition for job applicants is at sub-district local level. This is to ensure more geographic coverage of the new opportunities created through job creation process. Jobs need to be created in regions in proportion with unemployed persons in the region.

The following example explains the working of the methodology defined above.

Example

A total of 5,000 jobs are to be generated in a state. There are 50 families identified in the state which lost all of their earning members due to Covid 19. Assuming that there are 10 districts in the state, total unemployed population of districts of the state are given below in Table A and unemployed population of sub-districts of District 1 are given below in Table B:

Table A: District-wise unemployed population in state

| District | Total unemployed population |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| District 1 | 5,07,938 |
| District 2 | 5,17,608 |
| District 3 | 6,59,420 |
| District 4 | 2,03,872 |
| District 5 | 9,41,948 |
| District 6 | 6,19,915 |
| District 7 | 9,88,737 |
| District 8 | 4,34,092 |
| District 9 | 9,05,095 |
| District 10 | 9,39,212 |
| State total | 67,17,837 |

Table B: Sub-district-wise unemployed population in District 1

| District | Total unemployed population |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Sub-district 1 | 1,17,354 |
| Sub-district 2 | 99,523 |
| Sub-district 3 | 1,12,061 |
| Sub-district 4 | 85,000 |
| Sub-district 5 | 94,000 |
| District1 total | 5,07,938 |

Based on the above information, show the job creation scenario in District 1 of the State:

Solution:

Step 1 -

Since all the families which lost all of their earning members due to the Covid 19 outbreak will get one job, 50 of 5000 jobs need to be given to candidates from such families, maximum 1 job per family.

For remaining 4,950 jobs, we first need to estimate share of unemployed population of each district in state's total unemployed population and share of unemployed population of each sub-district in district's total unemployed population in order to distribute jobs at hand in proportion with unemployed person available for work. This can be done as follows:

From Table A, share of District 1 in state's total unemployed population = $(5,07,938/67,17,837) \times 100 = 7.6 \%$

Hence, 7.6% of total jobs (remaining after giving one job to each family who lost all earning members must) be created in District 1.

So, total number of jobs to be created in District 1 = $7.6/100 \times 4950 = 374$
 Similarly calculated, number of jobs to be created in each District are given in Table C below:

Table C: District-wise jobs created in state (after allocating 50 jobs to families which lost all its earning members)

Doing similar calculations at District level
 From Table B:

Share of Sub-district 1 in District 1's total unemployed population =
 $(1,17,354/5,07,938) \times 100 = 23.1\%$
 Hence, 23.1% of total jobs of District 1 must be created in District 1.

So, total number of jobs to be created in District 1 = $23.1/100 \times 374 = 86$

Similarly calculated, number of jobs to be created in each Sub-district are given in Table D below:

Table D: Sub-district-wise jobs created in District 1

From above calculation, 5000 jobs which are to be created in State must be distributed at sub-district level to distribute it at sub-district level. This approach will help spread the jobs geographically in a better way as the competition for jobs will be at sub-district level and not at the state level. Now, the number of jobs given in Table D can be created according to the methodology described in this document.

| District | Total jobs created |
|-------------|--------------------|
| District 1 | 374 |
| District 2 | 381 |
| District 3 | 486 |
| District 4 | 150 |
| District 5 | 694 |
| District 6 | 457 |
| District 7 | 729 |
| District 8 | 320 |
| District 9 | 667 |
| District 10 | 692 |
| State total | 4,950 |

TABLE C

| District | Total unemployed population |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Sub-district 1 | 86 |
| Sub-district 2 | 73 |
| Sub-district 3 | 83 |
| Sub-district 4 | 63 |
| Sub-district 5 | 69 |
| District1 total | 374 |

TABLE D

A few examples of how the marks of candidates can be calculated are given below:

Candidate 1: A male candidate belonging to a family which had 1 earning member who died of Covid 19 infection. No other person from this family has been given any job. What are his marks?

Answer: His marks will be 100% and he will get a job for sure.

Candidate 2: A female belonging to a family which had 1 earning member who died of Covid 19 infection. One person from this family has already been given a job. What are her marks?

Answer: Her marks will be 0% and she will not get a job for sure. Only one person per family at maximum will get job under this scheme.

Candidate 3: A male applicant belonging to a BPL family which has total 6 members. This family had 2 earning members prior to Covid outbreak and one of the two earning members died of Covid 19 infection. This candidate is a graduate with 10 years of relevant experience. What are his marks?

Answer:

(1) His marks based on education = 15

(2) His marks based on experience = $1 \times 10 = 10$

(3) His marks based on dependency ration of family ->

Number of total family members = 6

Already earning member = 1

Dependency ratio of family = $6/1 = 6$

Hence, marks for dependency ration = $10 \times 6 = 60$

(4) His marks based on economic condition (BPL) = 20

(5) His marks based on earning members died of Covid 19 = $1 \times 10 = 10$

(6) Marks based on gender = 0

Hence, his total marks will be = $15+10+60+20+10+0 = 115$

Candidate 4: A female applicant belonging to a general non-EWS family which has total 4 member. This family had 1 earning members prior to Covid outbreak who is still alive. The applicant is a higher secondary pass with no relevant experience. What are her marks?

Answer:

- (1) Her marks based on education = 12
- (2) Her marks based on experience = $0 \times 10 = 0$
- (3) Her marks based on dependency ration of family ->
Number of total family members = 4
Already earning member = 1
Dependency ratio of family = $4/1 = 4$
Hence, marks for dependency ration = $10 \times 4 = 40$
- (4) Her marks based on economic condition (non-ews) = 0
- (5) Her marks based on earning members died of Covid 19 = $0 \times 10 = 0$
- (6) Marks based on gender = 5

Hence, her total marks will be = $12+0+40+0+0+5 = 57$

If we compare marks of Candidate 3 and Candidate 4, Candidate 3 got 115 marks based in the methodology since he belonged to BPL category, lost one earning member in Covid outbreak, has higher dependency ration of 6, has 10 years of experience and a graduate degree. In contrast, Candidate 4 got 57 marks because she belonged to none of BPL, EWS, Antodya category, lost no earning member because of Covid 19, has zero years of relevant experience and is higher secondary pass.

Similarly, marks of each applicant can be calculated and top 86 candidates in the list can be given jobs in sub-district 1 of District 1. Similar approach will follow for other sub-districts and districts.

Equally distributed vacancies to the batch of 30 can be calculated using above methods and the total vacancies available are fairly distributed based on calculated fraction to each batch of 30 applications.

¹ Coronavirus will infect half the global population, EIU predicts

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/18/coronavirus-will-infect-half-the-global-population-eiu-predicts.html>

² <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

³ Ibid

⁴ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/1111063/india-coronavirus-covid-19-testing-pre-million-by-state/>

⁵ <http://science.thewire.in/the-sciences/covid-19-data-test-positivity-case-fatality-india-states/>

⁶ <https://www.icmr.gov.in>

⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-51235105>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/countries-confirmed-cases-coronavirus-200125070959786.html>



AMEETA MULLA WATTAL

RELEARNING TEACHING, RETEACHING LEARNING

The first global crisis of this century has led to a complete disruption of the world. Imparting of education has been dramatically impacted during this period. How do we view, review, and reshape ourselves in an uncertain post-pandemic world?

India is said to hold a unique position in the world in terms of demographics. It has a young population, with 64.7% of the citizens between the ages of 15 to 59 years.¹ This represents substantial economic prospects for the country if tapped and nurtured well.

We are facing a global learning crisis. Three hundred thirty million children are in school but unable to learn.² Apart from that, 175 million children are not in school across the world.³ In October, 2019, long before Covid-19 got our attention, the World Bank resolved to ‘cut by at least half the global rate of learning poverty by 2030’.⁴ It is pertinent to reproduce an excerpt from their website on the subject⁵:

“Using a database developed jointly with UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the Bank estimates that 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. In poor countries, the level is as high as 80 percent. Such high levels of learning poverty are an early warning sign that all global educational goals and other related sustainable development goals are in jeopardy.”

The learning that we now need will be completely different from the education that we currently receive. New challenges and opportunities have emerged for educators, parents, and students to look at learning in a technological, social, and emotional context. We will need to update technology so that we can implement effective policies by ensuring that a large amount of funds are invested in education, especially in education technologies.

Amidst so much uncertainty, what is the future path we must traverse? What will our students need to know, believe, and do in order to add value to such a rapidly changing world? Will our schools summon professional courage to shift their practices to enable the personal growth of the next generation?

The same technologies that created the Internet and the information revolution will have the power to transform education. What we now see on the horizon is Education 3.0, a new phase in which educators will develop and implement a transformative template for the coming years. Education 3.0 will build on the Education 2.0 reforms, but add the power of cutting-edge communications, the latest pedagogical tools, and collaboration technologies to equip learners for work and life in the present age. This will adequately prepare students for the future. We must give them these digital tools required to find, select, structure, and evaluate the information that already permeates the life of this century.

Our approach will have to shift away from the notion of a singular path towards a more elastic understanding of making schools technologically alive. This crisis requires us to recreate learning platforms across the world. All crucial skills will have to become teachable and learnable anytime and anywhere.

Mindsets change in traumatic situations. Pandemic trauma has affected the teaching community significantly. They have to reset and rewire their teaching brain besides transacting a different kind of learning in the classroom. The educators who had earlier shied away from technology have had to teach not only the students of their classes but have been witnessed by entire households when they have entered people's homes through online teaching.

This has interestingly resulted in the need for an in-depth assessment of teacher's content knowledge, skills, and persona, allowing stereotypes to break. Parents across the world have realized the value and depth of learning that teachers bring to their children. We need to understand also the physical and emotional wellbeing of teachers. People have to wake up to the challenges of the teaching community and focus on other equity gaps, which include teacher's salaries.

The curricula that were focused on equipping students for the last century has suddenly become redundant for today and beyond. Emotional and Social skills are essential and will become integral to teaching, as will interpersonal communications, problem-solving, critical thinking, empathy, negotiation, conflict resolution, dialogue, and relationship building. These will offer the most powerful keys to success in the changing world, replacing the narrowly focused, repetitive skills that are the earmarks of an age gone by. Every knowledge worker will have to be trained to think creatively, innovate widely, and use technology-based collaboration tools effectively in order to earn a livelihood.

The greatest poverty generally occurs in nations where education is not given primacy in budgetary allocation. An effective strategy for a country like ours makes it imperative to invest in 21st-century pedagogies, with educational content delivered via economic wireless communications infrastructure and Web 2.0 technologies.

It will be necessary to physically equip teachers and students with better tools in the Classrooms. Increasing access to laptops and other gadgets, installing interactive whiteboards, providing fast and reliable internet access will be crucial.

Technology has been playing a role in education for some time; most schools have not taken full advantage of the benefits offered by intelligent, multimedia-capable networks and collaborative technologies. In order to overcome significant barriers and transform learning and meet the future, broadband access must be extended to those areas where it is currently unavailable or unaffordable.

At one level, technology connects people, but it has limitations as far as teaching and learning are concerned. These limitations are of various kinds. This crisis has made us reflect on the inequality not only in bandwidth, and devices, which are very important but also in the fact that the parents do not have the time or ability to support their children in this venture. Schools of brick and mortar cannot be completely dispensed with as places of learning. They are a reflection of community, time, care, and values, which technology has not been able to touch yet.

Only a fraction of students across the world have moved to online learning exposing the deep inequity in the system, opening a digital abyss. As a result of the pandemic, the economic crisis will bring about job losses across groups. The already vulnerable will be most affected. Today in India, over 90% of students do not have devices that allow them to access online learning holistically. This divide will worsen, and the children from marginalized communities will be left out.

One way to ensure more equity here is the utilization of TV channels and radio to advertise and spread awareness; the recordings of teachers' lessons can be played for common subjects. The relay of the online classroom could be done on a rotation basis. It can be divided according to the number of users in a specific region and broadcast accordingly. The audio telecast can be used as a parallel mode of teaching for some areas, where there are connectivity issues or technological deficits. The time limit of a video/audio class also needs to be kept in mind as there can be issues of weak signals, low bandwidth in certain areas. Central and state governments must create an app like Microsoft teams/zoom/google platforms, to which teachers and students should have free access, which will help in dealing with financial constraints.

Communication of and/or transmission of content is only one part of the problem. The fact that any discussion around education today begins and ends

only with this aspect reminds is of the fact that scores, grades, and tests have taken over institutions of learning. Today more than ever, our young are triggered, flooded, and overwhelmed.

Social-Emotional-Learning (SEL) has to be embedded in the curriculum. It is important that we create a learning experience around SEL so that we can help deconstruct the conflict that children would have faced during the crisis. This will help us identify the areas of stress, detachment, and confusion, that may have affected them.

The interdependence of life is essential for our survival. We educate our children so that they can take forward our values, culture, learning, and keep them alive. This can only happen if there is a holistic, empathetic, and adaptive audit of our learning system that encourages children to move from the intimate to the ultimate, from the local to the global.

Learning everywhere is evolving. With globalization, a dilution of boundaries is taking place, creating both interdependence and insecurity. In fenceless societies, all of us, strong and weak, majority and minority, rich and poor, will feel equally threatened by the other. Hence, the learning systems will call for partnerships and alliances, a move from a self-centered existence to co-existence, from confrontation to interaction, from alienation to collaboration. To achieve meaningful education, we must enable our children to live together in mutual empowerment.

¹ http://www.censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/SRS_Report_2016/6.Chap_2-Population_Composition-2016.pdf

² https://report.educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Learning_Generation_Full_Report.pdf

³ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/175-million-children-are-not-enrolled-pre-primary-education-unicef>

⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/10/17/new-target-cut-learning-poverty-by-at-least-half-by-2030>



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From following a health worker in a small village in Bihar as she goes about her day in the pandemic, to a peek into how some gig companies adapted and approached the crisis; from the thinking rooms of the internet's global governance to the brass tacks of generating quantifiable employment to a visit inside a cinema hall of the post Covid-19 future this Kaleidoscope or this book if you want to call it that has all this and more. With questions and reflection as novel as the virus itself — What are the challenges Covid-19 poses for sexual harassment redressal committees? Is the internet really as dystopian and toxic as it is made out to be? How does the fact that you don't know your milkman's name affect our collective capacity to deal with the pandemic? How will school teaching and learning be affected? What is the migrant worker thinking? Join us on a journey into the minds of diverse global experts. No webinar will come close



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