

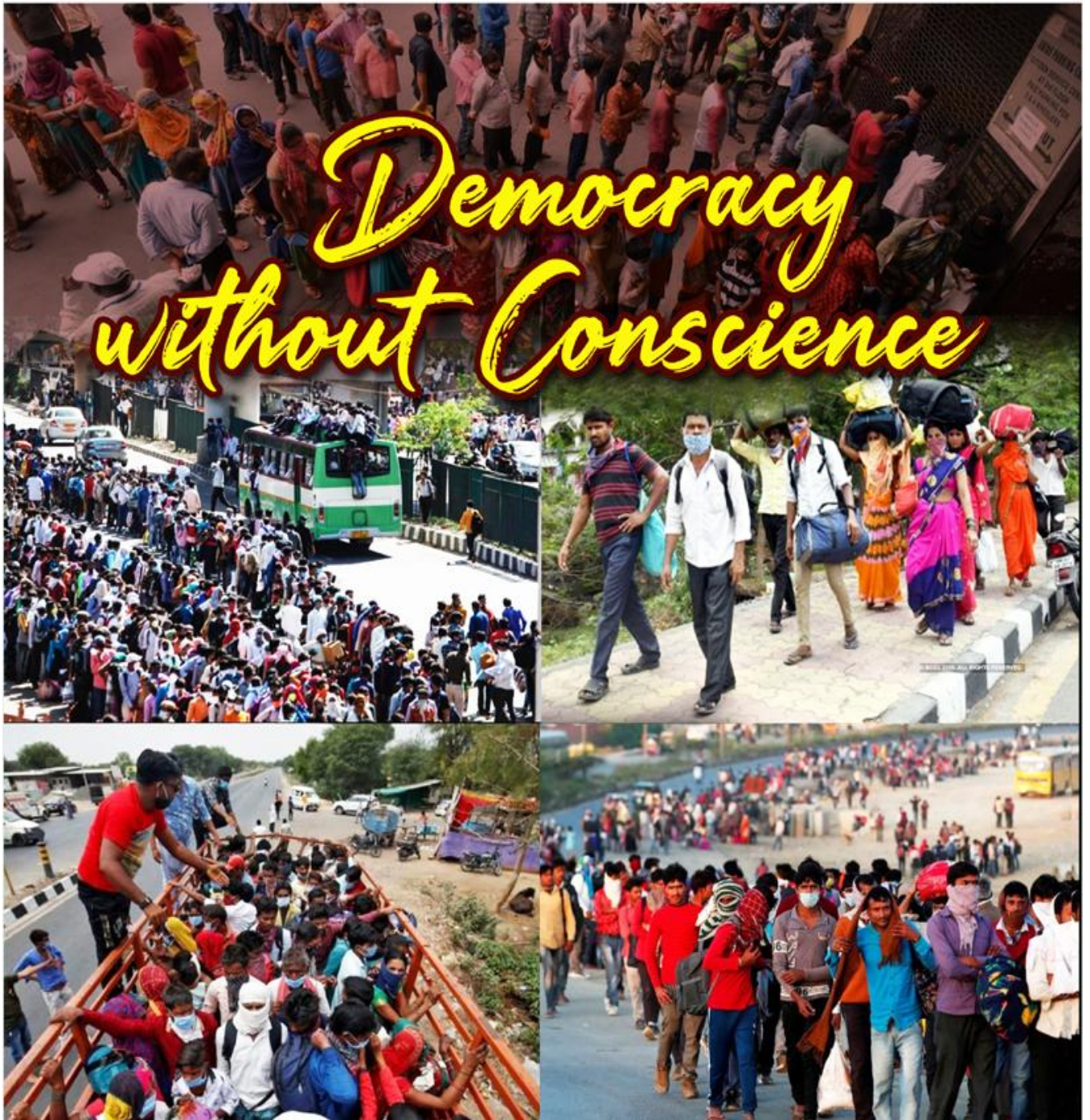
RALLY

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The Next Issue June 2020
of 'Rally' is on
'Living one with Nature'
AICUFers, Ex-AICUFers
and Friends
are encouraged to send Articles
on the theme before the
First Week of June 2020

Rally

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Rallying Point

Prof. Julia Pradeepa

SOCIAL DISTANCING was the word that even a small child can relate to after the last two months of lockdown in our country. Is the word right? Shouldn't we be using Physical distancing or individual distancing? The government uses the word because it really has *socially distanced* itself from the poor and the marginalised sections of the country.

When the Prime Minister announced a 21 day lockdown on March 24 at 8 pm , he had socially distanced himself from the poor, migrant and downtrodden sections of the country? If not how will he make an announcement that will affect approximately 10 crore migrant labourers throughout the country? How did he forget the farmers and the others who comprise 40 crore of India's workforce?

How could he forget the tea sellers and street vendors and other unorganised workers at this time? Why should we blame the Prime Minister says a particular group. In a difficult situation like this this was the best option to keep people safe. But did we really keep people safe?

This lockdown has killed more people in our country more than the virus. The unorganised sector, the migrant labourers, farmers etc. were conveniently forgotten during this lockdown. We do not have the proper statistics of how many people died due to starvation and hunger in the last 60 days.

The government is busy announcing packages which is of no use to these people. It is busy waiving off loans of the corporates. The rich and elite were not affected by this virus. The government was able to send special flights to bring the Indians stranded all over the world but had no time to think of its poor and the marginalised.

State governments announced a few packages which also will not truly help these people. Why should a government employee or an employee of the It sector or businessmen be given 1000 rs as COVID relief? The people who were living a comfortable life buying online also were given this compensation. The government has a database which could have been properly studied and the really deserving people could have been helped with the basic things needed for these few months. Only a few states were able to do this properly.

The government has socially distanced itself from the poor and the downtrodden people whose livelihood has been devastated. Why didn't the government make direct transfer money to the Jan Dhan account? Instead of doing something proper for the people , it is busy with statistics. Announcing 20 lakh crore rupees for whom? Showering flower petals for what? Lighting lamps for what? Will these people who walked miles on foot and people who died on the railway tracks or people who could not see their loved ones before they died be at rest because of these measures?

Whose government is this? 

IN AICUF SOLIDARITY


Fr. S. Emmanuel SJ.
National Adviser

IT IS QUITE long since we are locked within the four walls of our homes. On the one hand there is loss of life and on the other hand many are forced to face slow death due to economic show down and loss of employment opportunities. Emergence of Covid-19 in the end of December 2019 till date this pandemic spread all over the globe, killing thousands and thousands of people, particularly in the developed nations. The poorer nations suffered less in terms of loss of human life, but their economic base is totally destroyed and the future of millions and millions of people are facing a future threat. Government administrations, economic experts and the scientists have not arrived at quick solutions to solve the problems. The humanity is pushed in various types of changes in different walks of life. In the final analysis all are coming to a conclusion that humans and all living beings must learn to live with the Virus Covid-19, which means changes are inevitable in all spheres of life.

Introduction of 5G is not related to the outbreak of the virus. Since the virus is thickly coated with protein layers, it might withstand variations in the temperature. This mutant variant of Coronavirus, COVID-19, probably will be with the humanity for many more years to come. Discovery of new vaccine to control is a long process since it involves human trials. Animal model testing alone is not sufficient. It is a sorry state of affairs to see thousands of people dying in United States of America, Europe and other temporal countries. Comparatively the death rate is lower in the Asian countries possibly that the Asians regularly receive different types of vaccines in their early childhood and their immunity seems to be much higher than the people of the developed nations.

Questions that are not yet answered, are the following. COVID-19 will it linger on amidst the human population endlessly or will it appear seasonally in the future? How are the transport systems going to function in India? Will the migrants re-migrate or settle down in their own states? How are the central government and the state governments going to save the nations' economic crisis? What is the future of the theatre based entertainment industry? Will it survive this Covid crisis? How are the religious worship places going to adapt to the new environment? Is there any guarantee that the present virus Covid-19 mutate to begin extremely dangerous than now? There are more uncertainties than answers.

At this juncture AICUF has to shift to virtual webinars in different languages. National AICUF secretariat is establishing a digital library for all the subjects. Students can download digital books of your subject and send to this email: aicufnews@gmail.com. If 'You tube talk's on the following subjects namely, dalits, tribals, women, refugees, migrants are available with you, can send the link. Social awareness action programmes and movies also can be downloaded and sent to aicufnews@gmail.com.

State AICUF must raise scholarship to help the poor students who are struggling to meet their educational expense. 

May 14 Pope Reminds Religions Today Unite in Prayer & Fasting for End to Pandemic

(Here is the homily of the Pope at the Mass on 14 May 2020, a day dedicated to prayer, fasting and good works for an end to COVID-19 pandemic by the faithful of all religions)

IN THE FIRST READING we heard the story of Jonah, in a style of the time. Since, we don't know, there was "some pandemic" in the city of Nineveh, a "moral pandemic, perhaps, [the city] was about to be destroyed (Cf. *Jonah* 3:1-10). And God sends Jonah to preach: prayer and penance, prayer and fasting (Cf. vv. 7-8). In face of that pandemic, Jonah got scared and fled (Cf. *Jonah* 1:1-3). Then the Lord called him a second time and he agreed to go and preach this (Cf. *Jonah* 3:1-2). And today all of us, brothers and sisters of all religious traditions, pray. It is a Global Day of Prayer and Fasting, of Penance, proclaimed by the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity. Each one of us prays, communities pray, Religious Confessions pray, they pray to God: all brothers, united in fraternity, which brings us together in this moment of sorrow and tragedy.

We weren't expecting this pandemic. It came without our expecting it, but now it exists. And so many people are dying. So many people are dying alone and so many people are dying without being able to do anything. The thought can often come: "It doesn't touch me; thank God, I've been spared." But think of others! Think of the tragedy and also of the economic consequences, the consequences on education, the consequences . . . what will happen after. And, therefore, today all brothers and sisters, of whatever Religious Confession, pray to God. Perhaps there'll be someone who'll say: "This is religious relativism and it can't be done." But why can't it be done to pray to the Father of all? Each one prays as he knows how, as he can, as he has received from his culture. We are not praying against one another, this religious Tradition against that other, no! We are all united as human beings, as brothers, praying to



God according to our own culture, according to our own Tradition, according to our own beliefs, but as brothers praying to God and this is important! Brothers, fasting, asking God's pardon for our sins, so that the Lord will have mercy on us, so that the Lord will forgive us, so that the Lord will stop this pandemic. Today is a day of fraternity, looking to the one Father, brothers and paternity — Day of Prayer.

Last year, in fact in November of last year, we didn't know what a pandemic was: it came as a deluge, it came suddenly. Now we are waking up a bit. However, there are so many other pandemics that make people die and we don't realize it, we look elsewhere. We are somewhat unaware in face of the tragedies that are happening in the world at this time. I

only want to mention to you an official statistic of the first four months of this year, which does not refer to the coronavirus pandemic but another. In the first four months of this year, 3.7 million people died of hunger. There is the pandemic of hunger. In four months, almost four million people died. Today's prayer to ask the Lord to stop this pandemic, must make us think of the other pandemics in the world. There are so many — the pandemic of war, of hunger, and so many others! However, what is important is that today — together and thanks to the courage that the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity had — we were invited to pray, each one according to his own Tradition and to observe a day of penance and fasting and also of charity, of help to others. This is what is important. We heard in the Book of Jonah that the Lord — when He saw how the people reacted, who converted, the Lord halted, He halted what He wanted to do.

May God stop this tragedy, may He stop this pandemic. May God have mercy on us and also halt the many other awful pandemics: that of hunger, of war, of children without education. And we ask this as brothers, all together. May God bless us all and have mercy on us all.

Rally 

5 Important Lessons

The Coronavirus Pandemic has Taught Us so far

Alice G. Walton
Healthcare

Staying sudsy for at least 20 seconds is now part of our psyches.

It's good to listen to data

We all want to think this will be magically over when

the weather gets warm, but as the “country’s governor” (Cuomo) said in his press briefing yesterday, let’s listen to the numbers and the data, not emotion and personal beliefs. The data show patterns that help determine the course we take, and the data should always come first. It would have been good to have listened to it much earlier on, but here we are. The numbers coming in every day may ultimately show that our approach can be more nuanced in the future—and hopefully it will be—but we need to understand what’s going on first.

We are super-social creatures

Psychologists and researchers have been saying this for many, many years—we have a deep innate need to be around other people and share experiences, and indeed our lives. All the research shows that people who are more connected are happier and healthier in the long run. And



BEING a few weeks into the pandemic here in the U.S., some lessons are beginning to emerge. Some are crystal clear—like, health care workers are amazing and we owe them a huge debt. It is the same for grocery store employees, deliverymen and -women, and the many other essential workers who keep us going. Other lessons are fuzziy, but starting to come into focus each day. And some of course won’t be clear until we’re further along, and epidemiologists, policy makers, and academics look back and try to understand what happened, hopefully with the benefit of hindsight.

But here are some funny lessons the pandemic has brought so far. Many we probably should have known all along, but the current situation has brought them out again in sharp relief. Hopefully we’ll be smart enough to remember them.

The world is wildly connected

We like to remember this one when it suits us—when talking about the connectivity that technology allows or the global

nature of business. But we are obviously all connected physically, too, as evidenced by the speedy spread of the virus around the globe. To think of countries as fundamentally separate from one another is fundamentally flawed. Once we internalize this, we’ll probably be better off, both psychologically and in our ability to plan for future pandemics.

Washing hands actually works

This might sound silly, but before the pandemic, most people might not have known that soap actually destroys certain kinds of viruses and bacteria. Now, having done a lot of reading on the subject, most people—and their kid—can probably explain in great detail why soap can obliterate microorganisms’ outer membranes, including the novel coronavirus. Who knew? Well, now we all do, and we’ll probably wash our hands a lot more frequently after this is “over.”

while many people knew this, now we really know it. Social distancing—now intentionally changed to physical distancing by the WHO, for just this reason—has been excruciatingly difficult as a way of life. We’re doing it, but it’s not natural or pleasant. But having done it will perhaps help us in the future realize how critical the “village” is, and how lovely it is to interact—the shake hands, to hug, snuggle, and all the other acts of social closeness that make us human.

Life won’t be the same after—and that’s o.k.

People have been saying this since fairly early on into the saga,

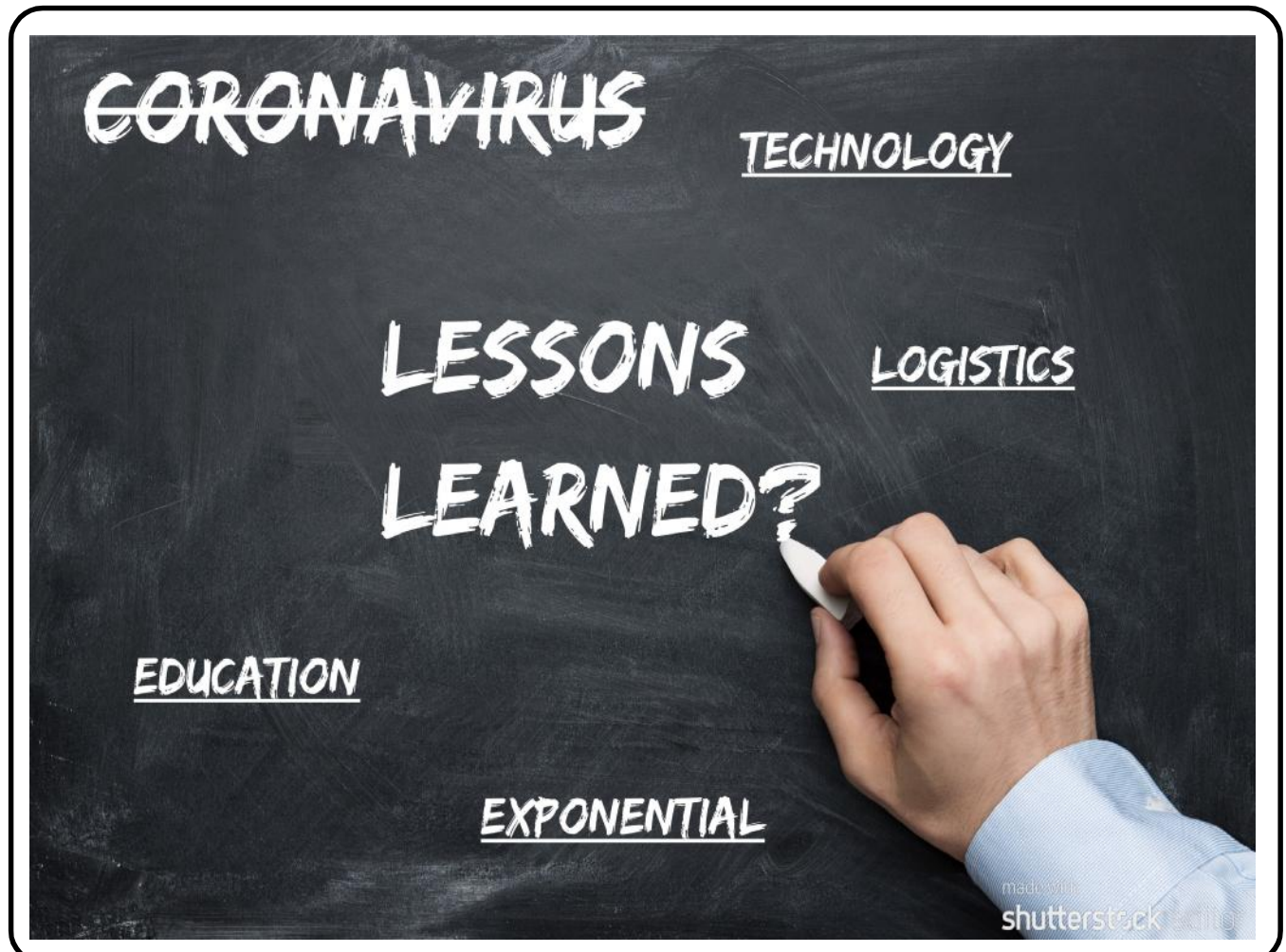
but it was hard to wrap one’s brain around—it was much more comforting to imagine that we’d spring right back to it after a month or two. But as “stay-at-home” orders extend, it’s easier to see that things have changed, some irreversibly, and for better and for worse.

We’ve been immersed, for example, in unbidden—but extremely valuable—real-world experiments in the powers of technological connectedness: telemedicine and working from home. These things will probably “stick,” to some degree, and make life better in lots of ways. We’ve also realized the extraordinary

importance of preparation; we knew a pandemic would come around at some point, but we were still somehow largely unprepared.

And while the social (physical) distancing experiment has been illuminating in the other direction—we want to get away from that part—we might be smarter in the future about how we interact. But hopefully we’ll also feel a new sense of appreciation if and when we do get to act normal again. And hopefully that, and the other lessons we pull from this over time, will stick around for a long time.

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20-lakh crore 'Magnum Opus' Is 'Jumla' On the People of India !

Pro-Corporate Thrust of Economic Package Flies in the Face of 'Atma-Nirbharta'!

Govt must address Lockdown Crisis which has pushed millions into penury: Urgent measures of food, transport, income, and work support are needed

19TH MAY, 2020: National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) condemns the absolutely insensitive, anti-poor and anti working-class approach of the Govt of India, reflected once again in the 'mega economic package' of Rs. 20 lakh crores, announced by the Prime Minister and Finance Minister in the past 5 days. Despite all word-play around 'Atma-nirbharta', the current regime has 'Abandoned' millions of toiling masses, who are left to fend for themselves in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic and horribly managed 'lockdown'! Instead, the agenda of corporatization and privatization has been pushed forth, across multiple sectors in the garb of 'relief' and 'development'!

The period since the sudden unplanned for national lockdown was imposed on the country, we have witnessed hitherto unknown levels of distress and displacement across the country. The pictures of migrant workers who have lost their livelihoods struggling to go back to their home towns – walking hundreds of kilometres in the scorching heat of the summer sun, with children, elderly and meagre belongings – are something that history will remember as a shameful period when lakhs of fellow human beings were allowed to face such indignities while the 'powers-that-be', watched on. The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan

Yojana (PMGKY) that was announced in the first week of the lockdown was hugely inadequate and even as late as the beginning of May the food and cash transfers had not entirely reached a large proportion of the beneficiaries!

The continuing exodus of migrants from cities, the ever-expanding lines at feeding centres run by governments and civil society organisations and the never-ending distress calls being received by various helplines also exposed the severe inadequacy of these measures. While after allowing only road transport initially, some 'Shramik Special' trains were finally set into motion,



one and half months of complete lockdown, so that migrants could return back. However, this was also done in an utterly chaotic, non-transparent manner, where in many states people were expected to even pay for the tickets. There continues to be complete confusion over whose responsibility it is to ensure the safe passage of the workers – the home states or the destination states – with both trying to get away with least liability.

Apart from the migrant workers, there are reports also of loss of livelihoods and resulting food insecurity amongst various groups of people including farmers, informal sector workers, small and medium enterprises and so on. With the closure of all economic activity, supply and distribution chains all over have been disrupted. It is clear that resumption of activity would require a major boost coming in the form of investments and fiscal expenditure by the central and state governments towards creating purchasing power. In simple terms, the government needs to put money in the hands of people!

In this situation of acute distress all over, the Prime Minister in his speech on 12th May announced what sounded like a grand vision for an '*Atmanirbhar India*' which included an economic package of around Rs. 20 lakh crores or about 10% of GDP. Unfortunately, but predictably, as the details of this 'package' were revealed by the Finance Minister over 5 days of press conferences, it became clear that this is yet another *jumla* where the central government wants to get away with doing almost nothing while seeming to be doing something very big!

As has already been written in many media reports, the outgo of the government in the form of fiscal expenditure seems to be coming to about Rs. 2 lakh crores i.e. 10% of what was promised. Along with the fact that the economic package does not make the much needed expenditure that the economy currently requires in the face of the slowdown it faces, it is quite unacceptable that this crisis is being used an opportunity by the government to push for 'reforms' which further the neo-liberal agenda of favouring profits over wages. The package therefore includes, for example, commercial mining in coal sector, corporatization of Ordinance Factory Board and removal of restrictions on Indian airspace. A whole host of privatisation and PPPs have been announced in electricity distribution, social infrastructure and even allowing the private sector to use ISRO facilities! When so many public sector enterprises are on 'distress sale' and path of privatization, '*Atmanirbhar Bharat*', is but a cruel and indefensible hoax!

A look at the various measures announced shows that the government is deliberately oblivious and insensitive to the current crisis the country is facing as a result of the pandemic and the lockdown. While the package has a number of long-term measures and reforms,

few of of them even desirable, there are hardly any responses to mitigate the hardships being faced by people currently. The brazen neglect of the urgency of the situation is beyond comprehension and unacceptable. Digitisation in education and meagre allocations for health sector when we are faced with a health crisis show clearly that the package completely fails to respond to the current situation!

The lockdown came at a time that was extremely crucial for agriculture. Harvest was disrupted in many places or in others where harvest was completed there were barriers in reaching the crops to the markets. Reports suggest that compared to last year, mandi activity this year is much lower and also that many have been forced to sell at lower prices, much less than even the costs incurred. Rather than announcing support to the farmers in the form of greater decentralised procurement of all crops, income support through cash transfers, higher MSPs, support for inputs for the next cropping season and so on, as part of the economic package, the only announcements relate to extending coverage of credit. While expansion of credit access for farmers is a laudable objective, this is not an adequate measure to respond to the current crisis. Losses borne by the farmers due to closure of agricultural activities also need to be compensated for,

which has not happened in spite of the 'Crop Insurance' scheme.

According to an RBI report in 2019, only 40 per cent of India's small and marginal farmers are covered by formal credit^[1]. Boosting concessional credit through kisan credit cards (KCC) can also be expected to have limited reach considering that according to Nabard's NAFIS Survey 2016-17, only 10.5 per cent of agricultural households were found to have a valid KCC. Further, the 'reforms' announced as part of the package towards deregulating agri-business will only benefit agribusiness corporate houses and multinational corporations and not the peasants and poor farmers. Despite the grand announcement that Rs. 20,000 crores would be allocated for the fisheries sector through Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) from 2020-21 to 2024-25 to develop marine and inland fisheries, it must be stated that PMMSY is a capital-intensive, export-oriented scheme, not in favour of the large section of the landless and asset-less small-scale fish workers.

In the MSME sector too, which was supposed to be a focus of the economic package, the attention is mainly only credit-expansion measures. While interest subvention for SHISHU Mudra loans is a positive step, it must be remembered that most of these loans were anyway not doing well and the borrowers were not in a position to repay. On the 3 lakh crore loans to MSMEs, there is some confusion with regard to the new classification of these enterprises as well as what the terms of the loans will be. It appears that support to MSMEs even in the form of loans is to those units that have turnover of 1 crore or more! However, the basic point remains that these are all supply-side interventions many of which may even be desirable but they are just not adequate to address the crisis in hand. In the current economic situation, where there has been such a massive onslaught on people's purchasing power it is difficult to imagine how there will be any



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demand for new loans where producers are faced with declining market demand for their goods. Cuts on the imports also may result in the boost to the large Indian corporates and not to the decentralised labour-intensive economic paradigm. Notwithstanding the shrill rhetoric of the PM on '*gruhodyog*' and '*gramodyog*', there is nothing much in the package for village co-operatives.

The moot point is that the economic package announced so far, completely misses the mark in responding to the present crisis situation. While it does include some desirable components, like for instance, building affordable housing complexes for migrant workers and urban poor, these are all long term schemes whose details are unavailable as of now. What is there to address the immediate situation of hunger is the announcement that 8 crore migrant workers will be given free 5 kgs food grain and 1kg chana dal for two months. This too, is too little, too late. Notably, the dal announced under PMGKY, back in March did not reach many states and the people, till date! Estimates suggest that even to meet the requirements of coverage under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), an additional 10 crore beneficiaries need to be added (67% of 2020 population).

As a result of crisis now, one can only expect that an even larger number of people would be

requiring food support. Further, given the exclusion errors in identification and the need to keep things simple in the current context, what would be required is a universalisation of PDS, where it is announced that any person who approaches a ration shop for grains is given food irrespective of whether they have a valid ration card or not. This can be done on the basis of any identity card that the person has. Given that the FCI godowns still have over 65 million tonnes of food grains and procurement operations of the *Rabi* crop are ongoing, universalisation of the PDS with higher quantity of grain is something that the government could have announced immediately. Rather than providing the grain to state governments at market prices of Rs. 21/22 per kg, the least that could be done is to make them available for free or at NFSA prices so that state governments are able to expand the PDS for everyone in need.

Similarly, the other available infrastructure that could be used to expand coverage and support is the MGNREGA. Providing work proactively in every panchayat, ensuring minimum wages and removing the limit on the number of days of work that a household can get would have been ways in which people could have been provided some relief immediately. Along with this, the platform could also be used to make much needed cash transfers to people. Economists and activists have been recommending a cash transfer of at least Rs. 7,000/- per household per month. This should be made to all beneficiaries of old age, disability and widow pensions as well. Schemes such as the PDS, MGNREGA and cash transfers to poor, farmers and informal sector workers would be most effective in generating demand across the country which is much needed not only to address the distress situation that people are in but also to revive the economy.

While images from across the country of migrant workers walking hundreds of kms to reach home is heart-rending, the imminent distress that other lower-income and middle-income groups face is also going to be huge, what with an all-time low economic activity. CMIE estimates indicate that about 1/4th of the working population i.e. 12 crore people are already unemployed. This massive level of livelihood loss requires radical measures, none of which is available in the current package. Instead of addressing the grave issues faced by the working class, both the Centre and multiple states have used the cover of lockdown to further dilute protective labour laws and regulations. In yet another recent low, at the behest of businesses, the Centre has withdrawn its previous Order of 29th March on payment of wages to workers amidst lockdown, further jeopardizing their already precarious condition!


Unfortunately, 'Atma-nirbhar India' does not mean government



supporting people to become self-reliant, rather the government's way of telling people that it has abandoned them in this moment of crisis and that they should somehow fend for themselves! This is indeed a wake-up call for all people's movements, trade unions, mass organizations and the people-at-large to organize against the skewed priorities of the current regime and assert what is rightfully theirs in our political economy.

Medha Patkar, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM); Dr. Sunilam, Adv. Aradhna Bhargava, Kisan Sangharsh Samiti; Rajkumar Sinha, Chutka Parmaanuvirodhi Sangharsh Samiti, NAPM, Madhya Pradesh;

Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, Shankar Singh, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), National Campaign for People's Right to Information; Kavita Srivastava, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL); Kailash Meena NAPM Rajasthan;

And many other eminent human rights activists and organizations. 

May Day 2020:

COVID Pandemic Places Spotlight on Seven Glaring Labour Rights Issues

Had existing laws and draft codes on migrant labour, construction workers, food security, unorganised workers and safety of healthcare personnel been properly followed up, the lockdown would not have been so catastrophic.



K.R. Shyam Sundar

People stand in a queue to collect food from volunteers in Surat. Photo: PTI

THIS YEAR, ‘May Day’ will be celebrated through virtual and other coronavirus-proof modes – through windows and on top of terraces, as individuals shout slogans and hold placards – but no less intense than in the past.

In fact, after a long time, this year is when worker solidarity should resonate throughout humanity stronger than ever before, as COVID-19 poses threats to the ‘lives and livelihoods’ of billions of people across the world. For long, there have been debates on the convergence of ‘human’ and ‘labour’ rights. Now, the pandemic demands it.

The novel coronavirus has impacted tremendously the world of work and exposed its institutional and legal inadequacies. This May Day presents an occasion not only for recalling labour’s contribution to India, but also to shine a spotlight on how the effects of the national lockdown on

workers should spark a renewed call for reform. **Anganwadi, ASHA and other scheme-based workers**

India’s frontline healthcare workers have been tested heavily in the last few months. An estimated 1.33 million anganwadi workers and helpers (AW/AH) are employed under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) which has been around since 1975. Another 1.05 million ASHA workers are engaged under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), which has been in existence since 2005, and have rendered sterling service during normal times.

More recently, both types of workers have been at the forefront of a number of special services like community surveillance, educating people about safe practices and tracking potential COVID patients in remote regions.

Anganwadi workers receive a meagre

honorarium of Rs 3,500-Rs 4,500. ASHA workers do not even receive fixed pay – they instead get a tasks-based variable honorarium with no career progress, no social security and the tragic joy of being called a ‘volunteer’.

In the past, anganwadi workers have conducted numerous struggles in many cities in India. Their major demands include: recognition as “workers”, regularisation of their services and status as government employees, fixed and enhanced pay (ranging from Rs 12,000 to Rs 18,000), and grant of wage arrears, pension benefits and so on.

Interestingly, in 1990, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) under the Rural Workers’ Organisation Convention (C.141, 1975), which India ratified in 1977, complained to the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) that by treating the anganwadi workers as “honorary workers” the government deprives “them of adequate pay scales and service conditions”. The government of India took the view that they are volunteers from a local village to serve people therein and work for four hours a day as visualised under the ICDS and hence “treating them as government employees negates the very basis of ICDS.”

The “service conditions, wages and social security for various categories of workers employed in different Central Government and State Government schemes” were discussed in the 45th Indian Labour Conference (ILC) in 2015. The tripartite conference committee constituted by it recommended that they should be recognized as “workers” and not as honorary workers or as volunteers, paid minimum wages, get social security benefits like gratuity, maternity benefit, pension, ESI and EPF coverage.

But the government repeated the same arguments above concerning the anganwadi workers: ASHA workers, it said, are honorary workers under the NRHM who only receive performance based incentives.

The arguments of the government are indefensible at the best of times and especially now that they are being pressed into service as ‘corona warriors’. It is essential that both types of workers get the status and labour market security that they deserve.

Frontline healthcare employees

In India, medical and healthcare employees – especially doctors, nurses (and ASHA workers) – have been shockingly subjected to various forms of harassment and even assault.



On April 20, 2020 the president issued an ordinance amending the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 which provides imprisonment for violence and damage caused to the defined health care personnel and medical property. The ordinance came rather late in the day, but it would not have even been necessary had the government enacted the proposed 'Healthcare Service Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of violence and damage to property) Bill, 2019' which had, in some cases, even tougher provisions than the ordinance.

The Bill is also more expansive in certain areas and like the ordinance should also include 'community health workers' in its coverage.

Violence against healthcare workers especially doctors is not new and medical personnel have often gone on strike demanding protection to their lives. The passage of this law must be high on the agenda in the coming months.

Migrant workers

The World Bank estimates that 40 million internal migrants have been impacted in India due to the COVID-19 lockdown,

The distressing exodus stories in the media over the last month have been quite disturbing. Migrant workers have been stripped of their livelihoods, may or may not be getting food and shelter in the states where they are currently trapped, even as their home states fear the spread of infection. This assume tragic proportions as their 'host states' benefit greatly due to their contributions.

At the same time, spontaneous protests have erupted in a few places – in Surat, hundreds of migrant workers protested in a very public manner at least three times. A clutch of public interest litigations and others have been filed in the Supreme Court and in various high courts.

It took the intervention of the apex court for the Central government to issue directions on April 12 to all state governments and Union Territories about "proper arrangements for food, clean

drinking water and sanitation" and for "sensitive handling" of the mental state of migrant workers. On April 27, the SC directed the Central government to submit an action plan to enable the return of the migrant workers tested negative for COVID-19. Finally, on April 29, the Union home ministry issued an order allowing willing state governments to arrange for the movement of their migrant workers.

The dynamics of this workforce and how they have been dealt a raw hand by the lockdown reveal a few dark realities.

The pandemic has starkly exposed the utter non-implementation of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979. While the Act has its own problems – in that it covers only workers brought into a different state by contractors and excludes voluntary migrants – if it had been implemented even a bit, Indian authorities need not be scurrying for a database regarding migrant workers at both the home and host state levels. Contractors who are registered formal entities could have been held accountable for extending necessary relief to them.

It takes a crisis of this magnitude for the issues of ever-vulnerable migrant workers to be featured on prime time TV and steal headlines in the mainstream media. The insensitivity of administrators and even the judiciary in dealing with migrant workers is appalling.

What they require above all is formal visibility in terms of either a portable ration card, an employment card, or a smart card if they are in the unorganised sector. Livelihood and labour market security including social security – like EPF and medical insurance – along with formalising their identities must be a major demand in the coming days.

Food security

Another reality revealed by the national lockdown – and reinforced by the Comptroller and Auditor General and Supreme Court – is that the

scope and implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) is far from ideal.

There is little doubt it should be universal and there are problems in terms of identification of eligible beneficiaries and other logistical issues that continue to bedevil the public distribution system.

The working class movement should continue to fight for effective and universal implementation of the NFSA along with the PDS as it is not just a labour but a human right.

Construction workers

It is well-known that many of the migrant workers land up in jobs in the construction sector. The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 (BOCWA) provides for social security and welfare of registration of construction workers. The money comes from the cess corpus collected at the rate of 1%-2% of the cost of construction incurred by an employer, minus the cost of collecting it under the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1996.

It is disconcerting that the Supreme Court had to issue orders to governments to implement the BOCWA in 2009, 2010, 2014 and 2018.

In 2018, the apex court issued detailed directions for implementation of the laws after more than two decades of their enactment.

It is estimated that in 2017-18, 54.3 million workers were employed in the construction sector, out of which the Central government claims that 35 million workers are registered under the BCOWA.

On March 24, the Centre directed states to transfer money to the registered workers from the unspent amount of Rs 56,000 crore lying in the cess fund. These workers suffered for want of administrative action even though laws and fantastic cash resources were in place.

In fact, the 2018 draft of the proposed Social Security Code Bill 2019 (SSC) drew strong criticism from academics and activists as it would have dismantled existing institutional structures and

required fresh registrations involving a little over five crore construction workers and other unorganised workers. The revised draft does not address those concerns. The working class movement should embrace demands for protecting and securing their legal entitlements even if the insensitive and non-comprehensive SSC is enacted.

Unorganised workers

In India, 419 million (90.50%) out of a total of 465 million workers were informal workers according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2017-18.

These workers are spread across the urban sector – housekeeping and restaurant industry (3 million), street vendors (2 million), garbage collections (1 million) and so on. In the non-farm sector, about 84% of workers are informal.

The UPA-1 government spurned the industrious efforts put in by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Un-organised Sector (NCEUS) headed by Arjun Sengupta and enacted the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 (UWSSA), which has been criticised by many.

The Act among others provides for registration of 14+ aged workers on self-declaration and the issuance of a portable and smart identification card. Workers' Facilitation Centres along with the local administration would register them. The Social Security Boards at the central and the state levels will among others advise social security schemes and review the process of registration and issue of identity cards.

However, it was only in June 2018 that the Centre initiated the process for introducing a single unified sanitised database which will assign a ten-digit Unorganised Workers Identification Number (UWIN) to every worker. According to the government's National Platform of Unorganised Workers – which was last updated in August 2018 – the UWIN process underway in Maharashtra is a sample. The Social Security Boards are ineffectual. All of this shows the limited progress in

implementation of the Act and widening of social security as envisaged by it.

While poor in substantive content, the logistical system envisaged in the Act if used effectively would have created a comprehensive and rich database which would have enabled direct cash transfers by now. More than a decade has passed, however, and the government is still groping for the basics of delivery of social security.

Two of the three labour codes that are pending – the Social Security Code, 2019 (SSC) and the Occupational Safety and Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019 (OSHC) – must take care of the much of the above and other issues.

The SSC is a patchwork of sorts and does not have a comprehensive picture and suffers from major shortcomings like rehashing existing laws with the same thresholds seen in the EPF and the ESI laws, etc. even after nearly seven decades after Independence. In fact, the Indian Labour Conference in 2015 gave in-principle agreement to universalisation of ESI coverage, including for the self-employed and reducing the threshold of the EPF Act from 20 to 10 workers.

COVID-19 as occupational disease

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) representing 200 million members of 332 affiliates in 163 countries and territories has recently declared that COVID-19 should be deemed an “occupational disease”, given that the probability of contracting it while working and travelling to the workplace is high and will be higher as relaxations will be issued soon in many countries.

In India, the Factories Act is a major law that addresses occupational diseases. The right to remove oneself from a potentially dangerous workplace is not present in our laws, though S.41H empowers the workers to be warned of imminent danger in a factory engaged in hazardous processes. The list of notified diseases under the Act mentions a biological hazard – Anthrax – but it does not cover all potentially dangerous biological agents as possible occupational

diseases. However, S.89(5) of the Act empowers the government to add a disease to it and the government must suitably include an item to cover the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Despite this, even if the laws mention all the diseases, unless they are transmitted through occupational exposure, they may not be classified as occupational diseases. Even the ILO in the document “ILO Standards and Covid-19” has admitted that their instruments do not comprehensively address the issues concerning biological agents and hazards and more importantly do not contemplate “the prevention” of diseases caused by these hazards. In fact, some academics have called for declaration of “workplace safety” as a fundamental right. Thus, workplace safety should be declared as a fundamental right and be comprehensively covered by the forthcoming OSHWC.

It is ironic that in 2020, the Indian labour movement will still be fighting for a 8-hour shift – some 135 years since the Haymarket affair took place in Chicago and the struggle for 8-hours began. Several state governments capitalising on the COVID-19 induced crisis have legally increased maximum working hours from 8 to 12 in a day and from 48 hours to 72 in a week, which has been severely criticised. In the meanwhile, the COVID-19 months have witnessed a loss of jobs, incomes and even shelter for many workers. There have been calls from employers for labour law reforms including prohibition of trade unions for a year and the government has indicated its keenness to effect them.

Who knows, maybe even the IR Code will be passed with provisions disintitling historically acquired labour rights. The challenges for labour rights in a post-pandemic world are clear and can only be solved through greater dialogue. COVID-19 has redefined the existing landscape and calls for a “new normal

<https://thewire.in/labour/may-day-2020-covid-pandemic-labour-rights>

Rally 

EDUCATION

What the Shift to Virtual Learning Could Mean for the Future of Higher Ed

Vijay Govindarajan
and Anup Srivastava

TECTONIC shifts in society and business occur when unexpected events force widespread experimentation around a new idea. During World War II, for instance, when American men went off to war, women proved that they could do “men’s” work — and do it well. Women never looked back after that. Similarly, the Y2K problem demanded the extensive use of Indian software engineers, leading to the tripling of employment-based visas granted by the U.S. Fixing that bug enabled Indian engineers to establish their credentials, and catapulted them as world leaders in addressing technology problems. Alphabet, Microsoft, IBM, and Adobe are all headed by India-born engineers today.

Right now, the Coronavirus pandemic is forcing global experimentation with remote teaching. There are many indicators that this crisis is going to transform many aspects of life. Education could be one of them if remote teaching proves to be a success. But how will we know if it is? As this crisis-driven

experiment launches, we should be collecting data and paying attention to the following three questions about higher education’s business model and the accessibility of quality college education.

Do students really need a four-year residential experience?

Answering this question requires an understanding of which parts of the current four-year model can be substituted, which parts can be supplemented, and which parts complemented by digital technologies.

In theory, lectures that require little personalization or human interaction can be recorded as multi-media presentations, to be watched by students at their own pace and place. Such commoditized parts of the curriculum can be easily delivered

by a non-university instructor on Coursera, for example; teaching Pythagoras’ theorem is pretty much the same the world over. For such courses, technology platforms can deliver the content to very large audiences at low cost, without sacrificing one of the important benefits of the face-to-face (F2F) classroom, the social experience, because there is hardly any in these basic-level courses.

By freeing resources from courses that can be commoditized, colleges would have more resources to commit to research-based teaching, personalized problem solving, and mentorship. The students would also have more resources at their disposal, too, because they wouldn’t have to reside and devote four full years at campuses. They would take commoditized courses online at their convenience and at much cheaper cost. They can use precious time they spend on campus for electives, group assignments, faculty office hours, interactions, and career guidance, something that cannot be done remotely. In addition, campuses



can facilitate social networking, field-based projects, and global learning expeditions — that require F2F engagements. This is a hybrid model of education that has the potential to make college education more affordable for everybody.

But can we shift to a hybrid model? We're about to find out. It is not just the students who are taking classes remotely, even the instructors are now forced to teach those classes from their homes. The same students and instructors that met until a few weeks back for the same courses, are now trying alternative methods. So, both parties can compare their F2F and remote experiences, all else held equal.

With the current experiment, students, professors, and university administrators must keep a record of which classes are benefiting from being taught remotely and which ones are not going so well. They must maintain chat rooms that facilitate anonymized discussions about the technology issues, course design, course delivery, and evaluation methods. These data points can inform future decisions about when — and why — some classes should be taught remotely, which ones should remain on the campus, and which within-campus classes should be supplemented or complemented by technology. **What improvements are required in IT infrastructure to make it more suitable for online education?**



As so many of us whose daily schedules have become a list of virtual meetings can attest, there are hardware and software issues that must be addressed before remote learning can really take off. We have no doubt that digital technologies (mobile, cloud, AI, etc.) can be deployed at scale, yet we also know that much more needs to be done. On the hardware side, bandwidth capacity and digital inequalities need addressing. The F2F setting levels lots of differences, because students in the same class get the same delivery. Online education, however, amplifies the digital divide. Rich students have the latest laptops, better bandwidths, more stable wifi connections, and more sophisticated audio-visual gadgets.

Software for conference calls may be a good start, but it can't handle some key functionalities such as accommodating large class sizes while also providing a personalized experience. Even in a 1,000-student classroom, an instructor can sense if students are absorbing concepts, and can

change the pace of the teaching accordingly. A student can sense whether they are asking too many questions, and are delaying the whole class. Is our technology good enough to accommodate these features virtually? What more needs to be developed? Instructors and students must note and should discuss their pain points, and facilitate and demand technological development in those areas.

In addition, online courses require educational support on the ground: Instructional designers, trainers, and coaches to ensure student learning and course completion. Digital divide also exists among universities, which will become apparent in the current experiment. Top private universities have better IT infrastructure and higher IT support staff ratio for each faculty compared to budget-starved public universities.

What training efforts are required for faculty and students to facilitate changes in mindsets and behaviors?

Not all faculty members are comfortable with virtual classrooms and there is a digital divide among those who have never used even the basic audio-visual equipment, relying on blackboards and flipcharts, and younger faculty who are aware of and adept in newer technology. As students across the nation enter online classrooms in the coming weeks, they're going to learn that many instructors are not

trained to design multimedia presentations, with elaborate notations and graphics. Colleges and universities need to use this moment to assess what training is needed to provide a smooth experience.

Students also face a number of issues with online courses. Committing to follow the university calendar forces them to finish a course, instead of procrastinating it forever. And online they can feel as they don't belong to a peer group or a college cohort, which in real life instils a sense of competition, motivating all to excel. Anything done online suffers from attention span, because students multi-task, check emails, chat with friends, and surf the Web while attending online lectures. We're parents and professors; we know this is true.

Can these mindsets change? Right now we are (necessarily, due to social distancing) running trial and error experiments to find out. Both teachers and students are readjusting and recalibrating in the middle of teaching semesters. The syllabus and course contents are being revised as the courses are being taught. Assessment methods, such as exams and quizzes are being converted to online submissions. University administrators and student bodies are being accommodative and are letting instructors innovate their own best course, given such short notice. Instructors, students, and university administrators should all be

discussing how the teaching and learning changes between day 1 of virtual education and day X. This will provide clues for how to train future virtual educators and learners.

A Vast Experiment

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has forced a global experiment that could highlight the differences between, and cost-benefit trade off of, the suite of services offered by a residential university and the ultra low-cost education of an online education provider like Coursera. Some years ago, experts had predicted that massive open online courses (MOOCs), such as Khan Academy, Coursera, Udacity, and edX, would kill F2F college education — just as digital technologies killed off the jobs of telephone operators and travel agents. Until now, however, F2F college education has stood the test of time.

The current experiment might show that four-year F2F college education can no longer rest on its laurels. A variety of factors — most notably the continuously increasing cost of tuition, already out of reach for most families, implies that the post-secondary education market is ripe for disruption. The coronavirus crisis may just be that disruption. How we experiment, test, record, and understand our responses to it now will determine whether and how online education develops as an opportunity for the future. This experiment will also enrich political discourse in the U.S. Some politicians have promised free college education; what if this experiment proves that a college education doesn't have to bankrupt a person?

After the crisis subsides, is it best for all students to return to the classroom, and continue the status quo? Or will we have found a better alternative?

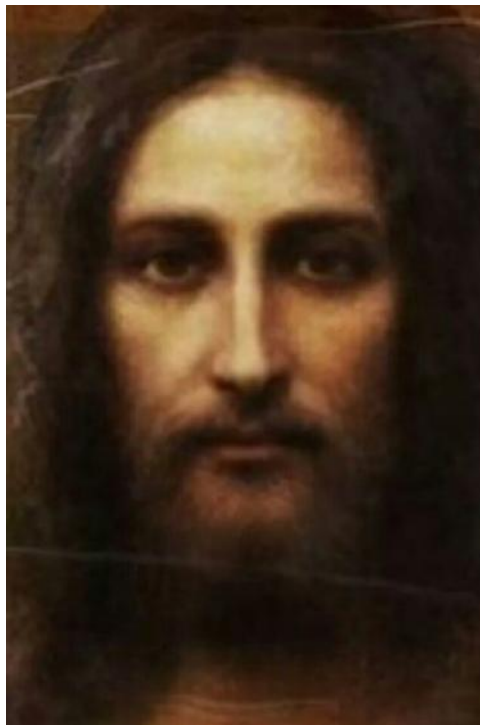
Rally 



Covid-19: Opportunity to reflect Jesus's human face

Jacob Peenikaparambil

INDORE, April 17, 2020: Several organizations and individuals all over the world are doing their best to save people from the jaws of pandemic Covid 19. Thousands of doctors, nurses and healthcare workers are the front line soldiers in the fight against coronavirus pandemic. The police, suppliers of essential items and people involved in providing essential services take great risk. Innumerable are the persons and organizations involved in the fight against coronavirus by providing finance, medicine, personal



protection equipments and food materials. God is working through all these individuals and organizations. Millions of people are sending their positive vibes and prayers for the people infected and affected by the deadly virus.

The Catholic Church in India has joined hands with federal and state governments to help the victims. Church-run hospitals have converted some wings as dedicated quarantine blocks. Education institutions also support in various ways.

Shelter homes offer food and place for the poor to stay. Many Church institutions and organizations provide food and shelter to migrant workers held up in various cities. Indeed God is working through human beings. The movie „Manjhi, Mountain Man ends with a pertinent statement by Dasrath Manjhi, the hero of the movie. “Dont wait for God to act; God may be placing his hope in us.” Disasters, both natural and human made, are the occasions for humans to act quickly and urgently. It is a time when prayer has to become action. It is not a time to spend

time and resources in dogmatic discussions that divert peoples from finding creative solutions.

According to Genesis 1:26-27, God created human beings in his own image and likeness. It means that human beings share in the freedom and creativity of God.

The scientific and technological progress that the world has made so far is nothing but the flowering of creativity that God has instilled in human beings. “Necessity is the mother of invention.” Human creativity finds solutions especially during crises. Covid 19 is indeed a huge

global crisis that has no parallel in human history. This is the time when all nations have to pool together their creative energies and find solutions and support each other.

At this crucial juncture the religious leaders have to inspire and encourage people to realize, actualize and maximize the Divine within them to withstand and overcome Covid 19. Most Catholics in the world have faith in Mary, Mother of Jesus as a role model of Christian living, a woman of altruism and sensitivity.

Is it needed to dogmatically proclaim Mary as “spiritual Mother of all Peoples” by the Pope at this point in time as recommended by two cardinals and six bishops? Will not Mother Mary bless her people without this additional designation given by Pope?

I dont think that Mother Mary will be pleased with one more title and would become extra generous. According to my faith, her generosity does not depend on the titles the human beings bestow on her.

These bishops and cardinals should have contributed from their resources to support people infected and affected by Covid 19 and should have presented themselves as role models of genuine love and altruism. This is the time for the Church to reflect the human face of Jesus through her actions.

Ever since Pope Francis assumed the role of the head of the Catholic Church, his concern has been presenting the human face of Jesus through the Church. His speeches, statements and actions have been focused on issues facing humanity. His encyclical Laudato Si, was in fact addressed to all people of the world for protecting humanity from an impending catastrophe.

He challenged the unjust global economic system. He has made advocating for the poor and unemployed, and against economic inequality, a hallmark of his papacy. In one of his speeches at Bolivia he had said, "An unfettered pursuit of money rules.

This is the "dung of the devil" "Go out to the peripheries!" has been Francis clarion call throughout his papacy, and it has been evident in his great concern for immigrants and refugees around the world. Another important concern of Pope Francis was resolving global conflicts.

Pope Francis brought together the presidents of Israel and the Palestinian authority on June 8, 2014 at Vatican to join in prayer and promise to seek peace.

I dont think that Pope Francis will divert his attention from issues afflicting humanity and focus on dogmatic issues that are not going to serve any

purpose. One more addition to the titles of Mother Mary will not make any change in the devotion and honour towards her on the part of the Catholic Faithful. COVID 19 has given an opportunity for the Catholic Church to reflect the human face of Jesus and many Catholics all over the world are sincerely doing it. Mother Mary is a great source of inspiration and encouragement for all these Catholics. Rally

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Lockdown, Invitation for Conversion From Religiosity to Spirituality

Jacob Peenikaparambil

ACCORDING to the Christian tradition Lent is a period specially meant for repentance and conversion. Special penance in the form of fasting and abstinence from using non-vegetarian food and special devotions in the form of way of the cross are observed during this period. Special prayers and rituals to commemorate the events related to the suffering and death of Jesus are observed during the Holy Week. Because of social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID 19 all gatherings, including programmes in all worship centres, are banned in India during the nationwide lockdown from March 25 to April 14. Perhaps in the history of Christianity, first time the Holy Week programmes in the churches are suspended all over the world. The Christian faithful of all denominations are advised to sit at home and pray. Lockdown to the homes for three weeks in itself is a great penance for many people. Those who suffer much due to COVID 19 are the poor, especially daily wage workers. Many of them walked hundreds of kms from the cities to reach their home town or village without food and drink. Against this backdrop I reflected on the significance of Repentance and Conversion. What kind of conversion is needed at the level of individuals and communities? When I started my reflection two passages from the Bible came to my mind: 1) Amos 5: 21- 24 and 2) Lk. 3:10-14. Conversion According to Prophet Amos

“I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”. (Amos 5: 21-24)

Lent is an occasion for the followers of Jesus to undergo a genuine conversion, and according to Prophet Amos, it is nothing but restoring Justice and Righteousness in abundance. That is why the prophet says, “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like ever-flowing stream”. In the absence of Justice and righteousness the rituals and prayers have no meaning. Prophet Amos very clearly and emphatically



says that God is not at all interested in the noisy songs and complicated rituals. In fact, God hates them. When people are not ready for a radical transformation in their attitude, mindset, relationships and behaviour, rituals and prayers become mere hypocrisy. They become a façade to hide their sins. I tried to understand the difference between JUSTICE and RIGHTEOUSNES. The meaning of justice is “to make right”. It is a relational term signifying people living in right relationship with God, one another and the natural creation, whereas righteousness refers to the correctness of individual’s actions. Righteousness signify going

beyond justice. For example, St. Joseph accepting Mary as his wife, although he was not bound to accept her as per the existing Jewish laws, is a sublime act of righteousness. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16) the master gives the same wages to the workers who came for work at different hours of the day. The one who came at the last hour also got the same wage received by the one who came in the first hour. This is another excellent example for righteousness. Justice and righteousness mean first and foremost liberating myself from religiosity of ritualism, legalism and dogmatism and brining about change in my attitudes and actions. If I have usurped someone's property I have to give it back. If I have not paid due wages or salary to the workers or if I have exploited someone I have to compensate them. If I have spoiled the good name of someone I have not only to ask apology but also to make efforts to restore his/her good name. If my actions are contributing to the overexploitation of nature's resources or pollution of nature I have to stop it and try my best to repair it. Putting pressure on others to part with their property or wealth in the form of gift under the garb of spirituality is also injustice and I should desist from it. True conversion requires liberating myself from greed. Genuine conversion also requires a firm resolution by me not to repeat the unjust actions and behaviour of mine. The best example of genuine conversion is the transformation of Zaccheus in Lk. 19:1-10. The presence and interaction of Jesus with Zaccheus brought about a radical change in him. "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." The transformation in Zaccheus is a big question mark before me as a priest and Religious. Am I ready to undergo a radical change as Zacceheus underwent? Am I able to bring about transformation in the persons whom I meet? Am I able to transform persons and communities through my various activities and involvements? I realize that in spite of the various rituals I perform, including the administration of the sacraments, my capacity to bring about change in the participants of the rituals and in other persons with whom I interact, is very limited. I also realize that my inability to bring about change in others is due to my failure to bring about change in me. Therefore I am convinced that before preaching about repentance and conversion I have to produce the fruits of repentance in me and those fruits are to be reflected in my life and actions. Otherwise my preaching will be empty words without any impact on the people. What God demands from me through prophet Amos is to become spiritual by practising justice and

righteousness. Conversion According to John the Baptist " And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." (Lk. 3: 10-14) John the Baptist spoke fiercely about the need for repentance and conversion. As he led an austere life with integrity, he could touch the hearts and minds of the people. He had the credibility to challenge the people, which the present day leaders both in the Church and in politics do not have. Many preachers who thunder about the punishment of God on the people and their capacity to stop God's punishment are ridiculed in the social media in the context of coronavirus.





Because of the integrity of John the Baptist and the power of his words people flocked to him with a question, "What shall we do?" As per the Gospel description three kinds of people approached John and these groups represent three classes of people in our society. The answer given to the three groups by John the Baptist indicate the type of transformation needed from each section. In fact these are the three dimensions of conversion that has to take place in a person. Large majority of people in any society belong to the class called, "Common People". They are the people who do not enjoy any privileged position in the society. To them John said, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." An explicit sign of conversion is sharing with the needy one's resources like wealth, assets, money, personal talents and capacities and even time. One of the core teachings of Jesus is sharing and it is a genuine expression of love. Parable of the Prodigal Son, parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man and parable of the Last Judgement state unambiguously that sharing one resources and time with other human beings is sharing them with God and it is true worship. According to 2019 Global Hunger Index report, there are 822 million hungry people in the world. About 200 million people are hungry in India. The world produces enough food to feed 10 billion people and the current world population is 7.6 billion. Human beings' greed, consumerism and reluctance to share with those who are needy are the real reasons for millions of people suffering from hunger and hunger induced death all over the world. To the second category of people, the tax collectors, Jesus said, "Collect no more than is appointed you." In other words it means stop exploiting others. Human beings exploit each other in different ways. Sexual exploitation of women and children are very

Rally

common in our societies. Persons who are in power sometimes exploit their subordinates and when they are questioned, the victims are harassed and even persecuted. The authorities who are expected to support and empathise with the victims, often side with those who are in power. Disciplinary actions are taken against those who protest and advocate for justice to the victims, instead of bringing the culprits to the books. The system that supports this mindset is sinful and it has to change, if real conversion is to take place. Genuine conversion requires supporting the victims and all those who are on the side of the victims. Trafficking of women and children for sexual abuse is a huge illegal business. Forced labour and forced marriages also come under trafficking and exploitation. Not giving just wages and other social security benefits to the workers is another form of exploitation. Participating in prayers and rituals and practising a number of devotions cannot be a substitute for not paying just wages to the workers. Desisting from all forms of exploitation is genuine conversion. John told the third group, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." The message is very clear, "Do not misuse or abuse your authority". Abuse of power is common in various realms of the society. Political field is the one in which

Abuse of power takes place most commonly. What we see today is that many who are in power, whether it is in the government or in religion, make use of their office to amass wealth, to take vendetta against the opponents and to harass and persecute those who criticize them. They often indulge in human rights violations. Jesus has not given authority to anyone to negate the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Indian constitution. No religious authority can take away or deny the human rights to their faithful, as they are inalienable. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", said John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton. The



panacea for abuse of power is putting in place systems and processes of participation, transparency and accountability. Refusal to make governance system participatory, transparent and accountable is a sign of non-conversion. All those who are in authority have to ask themselves, "Am I using the authority as a means to serve others or for my self-aggrandizement?" According to the teachings of Jesus authority or power is given to a person for fulfilling his/her responsibility. All those who occupy positions of power in the Church have to remember the words of Jesus, "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). Often laws are made use by those who are in authority to silence and oppress those who question injustice. Transfer is used as weapon sometimes by those who are in authority both in the political field and in the Church to settle scores with those who question the authorities. Pontius Pilot and the Jewish Sanhedrin misinterpreted the law and used it to condemn Jesus, because they found Jesus as a threat to their power. Crucifixion of Jesus is not something that happened 2000 years ago. It is also happening today. Genuine conversion requires desisting from misusing the laws. Righteousness demands going beyond the law. The most important law given by Jesus is LOVE. The criterion for the authorities in the Church is not Canon Law alone. There is a law that transcends Canon Law. We the followers of Jesus are called not to witness to Canon Law, but to witness to the law of LOVE and it requires a radical change. The message of prophet Amos, John the Baptist and Jesus are reflected in a poem of Rabindranath Tagore, "Go not to the Temple". "Go not to the temple to put flowers upon the feet of God, First fill your own house with the Fragrance of love... Go not to the temple to light candles before the altar of God, First remove the darkness

of sin from your heart... Go not to the temple to bow down your head in prayer, First learn to bow in humility before your fellowmen... Go not to the temple to pray on bended knees, First bend down to lift someone who is down-trodden. Go not to the temple to ask for forgiveness for your sins, First forgive from your heart those who have sinned against you!" Spirituality is love, purity of heart, humility, compassion and forgiveness according to Rabindranath Tagore. Jesus has unambiguously taught his followers that one can become spiritual through knowledge and contemplation. The lockdown has forced the followers of Jesus to be confined to their homes even without going to the Church during the Holy Week. Let the lockdown help the followers of Jesus to contemplate and become spiritual.

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Rally 

Smoke, mirrors and Modi: A Grand Illusion of Governance

Emotion and grand political statements may normally distract and attract voters. In a crisis, they are poor substitutes for governance.



The staff of INHS Asvini hospital are showered with flower petals by an Indian Navy helicopter as part of an event to show gratitude towards the frontline staff fighting the coronavirus disease in Mumbai on March 3. | Hemanshi Kamani/Reuters

Samar Halarnkar

IT IS NOW 41 days since the government told the Supreme Court that there were no migrant workers on the road any more. “They have been taken to the nearest available shelter”, and 2.3 million were being fed, India’s Solicitor General told the judges, who – in a now familiar routine – took the government at its word.

It is evident that statement was anything but the truth.

In the absence of jobs, food and transport services, thousands of stoic and weary migrant workers, who once powered India’s economy, continue epic journeys home on cycle or on foot, over hundreds, even 1,000, km. Parents carry children, drag luggage or balance bundles on their heads. The sick and the injured hobble along for as long as they can. Some drop dead of exhaustion or illness, either on the way or, tragically, after reaching

home. One group was mowed down while sleeping on rail tracks they thought was empty of trains.

India’s 53-day lockdown, extended in varying measures, was among the world’s toughest, but while it may have slowed the count of known Covid-19 cases, it hasn’t flattened the curve, contrary to government claims, one of which said there would be no new cases by May 16. “What we are seeing is that the cases are increasing at a linear pace,” the director of India’s premier medical institution, Delhi’s All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Randeep Guleria told *Mint* this week. “The major problem right now is we are not seeing a declining trend [as in Italy or China].”

Style over substance

Indians may have lit candles, banged thalis and watched awe-struck as jets streaked overhead, bands played and naval ships lit up in tribute to those on

the frontlines, but it was hard to find the substance behind the style. The feel-good, choreographed events around the coronavirus increasingly appear to be a cover for poor planning, apathy and an opportunistic exacerbation of Islamophobia and reduction of civil liberties.

A virus may not provide advance notice before striking. In this case, India did get early warning but did not do enough. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was being sparse with the truth on April 14, when he said India started checking passengers for the virus before its first known case on January 21. By that day, as *Factchecker.in* reported, only three airports had begun screening passengers (four more started on that day), and then only travellers from Hong Kong and China, although 20 countries had reported infections.

Mumbai residents clap and bang utensils from their balconies on March 22 to cheer for emergency personnel and sanitation workers who are on the frontlines in the fight against coronavirus. Credit: Francis Mascarenhas/Reuters

Despite warnings from its top medical research body that a lockdown alone would, at best, reduce peak infections on a given day by 40%, Modi's government ignored for a month – as journalists Nitin Sethi and Kumar Sambhav Srivastava reported (here and here) for www.article-14.com – advice from the Indian Council of Medical Research to urgently launch other interventions. These included door-to-door supplies of food and other essentials to the poor; district-wise infection monitoring; “fast reporting” to identify and quarantine infective clusters; mass quarantines for those in densely populated areas; and a rapid increase in hospital beds and intensive-care unit.

“This discussion has gone on for too long and no action has been taken,” Naveet Wig, member of the prime minister's Covid-10 task force and the head of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences' department of medicine said in leaked proceedings of an internal meeting on March 29. “No. No. We will have to tell the truth.”

Experts ignored

But the truth was never made public, and the 21-members of the task force were once again ignored when the government extended the lockdown on May 1, reported Vidya Krishnan for the *Caravan*. “Three months into the pandemic, as India struggles to contain growing cases, the sidelining of expert advice has become a trademark of the Modi administration's response to the novel coronavirus,” wrote Krishnan.

It is apparent that Modi's government discarded any suggestion of meticulous planning and execution, settling on a scrambled, knee-jerk response that caused economic and social chaos. To understand what good planning, communication and execution can achieve, Modi needs look no further than Kerala, which reported the highest number of cases when the pandemic began. It has now destroyed the curve, with only four dead, a mortality rate of 0.79%, compared to India's 3.4%: up to 93% of Kerala's Covid-19 patients have recovered, compared to India's 23%.

Instead, India currently struggles to comprehend a flurry of, often contradictory, orders and directives from Delhi, the confusion increasingly evident, as India tries to balance the imperatives of reviving a declining economy and holding down infection and death. The government's current struggle to achieve that balance is a consequence of previous blunders, which began with a four-hour notice for a national lockdown, stranding migrant workers nationwide without jobs, money and eventually food. Despite claims made to the Supreme Court that a couple of million workers were being cared for, Modi outsourced moral responsibility, asking India's people to “look after” those in need.

40 days of inaction

No trains or buses were organised for workers who wanted to return home but either could not or were not allowed to. The first trains started running after 40 days of pointless inaction, during which time workers in crowded accommodation risked infection,



which they might carry to relatively unscathed rural India – up to 80% of positive cases are from urban areas. In Karnataka, the Bharatiya Janata Party government cancelled the trains, after real-estate companies complained there would be no workers, just when construction was about to restart. After a storm of criticism, the decision was rescinded. In some cities, bitter workers said they would not return after being spurned in their time of need. As I write this, migrant-worker unrest is rife nationwide.

Companies hoping to restart must struggle against a tide of arbitrariness that passes for governance. Many district collectors and police officials operate like local satraps, interpreting the rush of government notifications as they will. “Covid-19 notifications,” writes Rahul Jacob, “have rained down like an unseasonal monsoon downpour.” He

points to 600 from Delhi and 3,500 from the states, quoting the think tank PRS Legislative Research.

Many companies, including those run by the government, say they cannot or will not obey government orders to pay workers during the lockdown. Unemployment has risen to record levels. Modi has urged employers “to be kind”, but his government has done nothing – as many countries have – to reimburse or in some way assist companies in keeping employees paid, even if partially. Nothing has been heard from a special economic task force since Modi announced it on March 19. There was silence, too, on an economic stimulus package, except from the government’s chief economic advisor who said this week that “there is no free lunch”.

Meanwhile, Modi’s government is pushing ahead with a grandiose Rs 20,000-crore project to build a new parliament building and redesign New Delhi’s Central Vista (instead, the Rajya Sabha announced spending cuts – of Rs 80 crore). In easier times, emotion and grand political statements may distract voters and pay handsome electoral dividends. In a crisis, they are noticeably poor substitutes for governance, subject as they are to diminishing returns and administrative anarchy.

Samar Halarnkar is the editor of Article-14.com, a project that tracks misuse of the law and the hope it offers.

Rally



Harbingers of Hope

In the time of Viruses and Lockdowns

by Anthony Dias SJ

THE VIRUS that causes the dreaded covid-19 disease
Has brought powerful persons and nations to their knees

Has flummoxed scientists, knocked down the hubris
Of Politicians and technocrats in the biggest ever crisis

Forcing them to shut down and announce lockdowns
Of entire villages, districts, megacities and little towns



As panic grips all nations and peoples, tightening its noose
People quarantine themselves, afraid of making wrong moves

Only a few dare to move out of the safety of their zones
To care for those rendered jobless and those without homes

Providing them medicine and food to meet dire need
Braving fear of the Virus that cares for neither country nor creed

Those who keep reading the signs of the times continue to be wary
Because there are other viruses lurking and far more scary

The battle they know will not end with the death of the *corona-virus*
For there is a bigger battle against the virulent *communal-virus*

But those who believe in the power of the crucified and risen Savior
Become harbingers of hope and lead without immobilizing fear!

Rally 

GOLDEN dawning spewed its beauty
To proclaim the glory of Almighty;
High pitched rooster's wakeup call
To start the day without fall.

On a misty morning lantern in hand with a watch dog
Treading along the green carpet drenched in fog,
Chirping and twittering melodious music of birds' songs,
Clucking hens motherly go free with chicks along,

Weaving of cool breeze with waving leaves;
Water bound fields hugged by Palmyra trees;
Quacking of dug lings for feed in the field;
Cows and Does aching with milk to yield;

Drinking tender coconut adds to one's health,
Playful building of sand castles no stealth,
Eating and laughing to gather united families
Spirit evaporated, the society is left in anxieties.

Miles on foot to fetch water from spring
Slow, laborious but so precious to drink;
Pristine pure no contagious nor pollution
Precious memories call for recollection.

My heart longs for those lovely days,
Playing living and loving nature always,
Rain and sunshine summer and winter
Seasons were regular making life better.

Not toiled to amass wealth and property;
Nor slave of success affluence but liberty;
Not in work prison, gadgets and dalliance,
Now no time to stand still and know to balance.

Greedy selfish desires swirl and wiped all.
Money stood tall and smart rolling all.
All malls and stalls bright round the clock,
Business and bullying grow equal stock.

Forest, wealth and power how captured
O cruel encroachers and users of nature,
O human a market animal not a social anymore
Beg pardon from nature or punishment is here and now.

Every nook and corner and cranny once busy;
In no time virus-halt made roads free,
No transport on trail or planes to hover,
Locked down made all to stare and share.

Monstrous Corona remains a mystery.
Humanity humbled in untold history,
Nature's time to heal on its own,
Sharing and caring is in high tone,
Join the battle and defeat the clone.



Humanity Humbled

Sr. Dr. A. Antony Maria Jansi FSAG
Gonzaga Generalate,
Puducherry.

Will warm weather really kill off Covid-19?

Many infectious diseases wax and wane with the seasons. Flu typically arrives with the colder winter months, as does the norovirus vomiting bug. Others, such as typhoid, tend to peak during the summer. Some people hope that outbreaks of the new coronavirus will wane as temperatures rise, but pandemics often don't behave in the same way as seasonal outbreaks. BBC Future looks at what we know.



By Richard Gray

MEASLES cases drop during the summer in temperate climates, while in tropical regions they peak in the dry season.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many people are now asking whether we can expect similar seasonality with Covid-19. Since it first emerged in China around mid-December, the virus has spread quickly, with the number of cases now rising most sharply in Europe and the US.

Many of the largest outbreaks have been in regions where the weather is cooler, leading to speculation that the disease might begin to tail off with the arrival of summer. Many experts, however, have already cautioned against banking too much on the virus dying down over the summer.

And they are right to be cautious. The virus that causes Covid-19 – which has been officially named SARS-CoV-2 – is

too new to have any firm data on how cases will change with the seasons. The closely related Sars virus that spread in 2003 was contained quickly, meaning there is little information about how it was affected by the seasons.

But there are some clues from other coronaviruses that infect humans as to whether Covid-19 might eventually become seasonal.

There is some hope that as temperatures warm up in the Northern Hemisphere, cases of coronavirus will start to fall (Credit: Getty Images)

A study conducted 10 years ago by Kate Templeton, from the Centre for Infectious Diseases at the University of Edinburgh, UK, found that three coronaviruses – all obtained from patients with respiratory tract infections at hospitals and GP surgeries in Edinburgh – showed “marked winter seasonality”. These viruses seemed to cause infections mainly between December and April – a similar pattern to that seen with influenza. A fourth coronavirus, which was mainly found in patients with reduced immune systems, was far more sporadic.

There are some early hints that Covid-19 may also vary with the seasons. The spread of outbreaks of the new disease around the world seems to suggest it has a preference for cool and dry conditions.

An unpublished analysis comparing the weather in 500 locations around the world where there have been Covid-19 cases seems to suggest a link between the spread of the virus and temperature, wind speed and relative humidity. Another unpublished study has also shown higher temperatures are linked to lower incidence of Covid-19, but notes that temperature alone cannot account for the global variation in incidence.

Further as-yet-unpublished research predicts that temperate warm and cold climates are the most vulnerable to the current Covid-19 outbreak, followed by arid regions. Tropical parts of the world are likely to be least affected, the researchers say.

Pandemics often don't follow the same seasonal patterns seen in more normal outbreaks

But without real data over a number of seasons, researchers are relying upon computer modelling to predict what might happen over the course of the year.

Extrapolating data about Covid-19's seasonality based on endemic coronaviruses – meaning viruses which have been circulating in human populations for some time – is challenging. That's not least because endemic viruses are seasonal for a number of reasons that might not currently apply to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Pandemics often don't follow the same seasonal patterns seen in more normal outbreaks. Spanish flu, for example, peaked during the summer months, while most flu outbreaks occur during the winter. (*Read more about what Spanish flu can teach us about Covid-19.*)

"Eventually we would expect to see Covid-19 becoming endemic," says Jan Albert, a professor of infectious disease control who specialises in viruses at the Karolinska Institute in

Stockholm. "And it would be really surprising if it didn't show seasonality then. The big question is whether the sensitivity of this virus to [the seasons] will influence its capacity to spread in a pandemic situation. We don't know for sure, but it should be in the back of our heads that it is possible."

We need to be cautious, therefore, when using what we know about the seasonal behaviour of other coronaviruses to make predictions about the current Covid-19 pandemic. But why are related coronaviruses seasonal, and why does that offer hope for this outbreak?

Coronaviruses are a family of so-called "enveloped viruses". This means they are coated in an oily coat, known as a lipid bilayer, studded with proteins that stick out like spikes of a crown, helping to give them their name – corona is Latin for crown.

A recent analysis suggests that this pandemic coronavirus will be less sensitive to the weather than many hope

His computer models certainly seem to match the pattern of outbreaks around the world, with the highest number of cases outside of the tropics.

Araújo believes that if Covid-19 shares a similar sensitivity to temperature and humidity, it could mean cases of coronavirus will flare up at different times around the world.

"It is reasonable to expect the two viruses will share similar behaviour," he says. "But this is not a one-variable equation. The virus spreads from human to human. The more humans at any given place and the more they get into contact with each other, the more infections there will be. Their behaviour is key to understanding the propagation of the virus."

A study from the University of Maryland has shown that the virus has spread most in cities and regions of the world where average temperatures have been around 5-11C (41-52F) and relative humidity has been low.

But there have been considerable numbers of cases in tropical regions, too. A recent analysis of the spread of the virus in Asia by researchers at Harvard Medical School suggests that this pandemic coronavirus will be less sensitive to the weather than many hope.

They conclude that the rapid growth of cases in cold and dry provinces of China, such as Jilin and Heilongjiang, alongside the rate of transmission in tropical locations, such as Guangxi and Singapore, suggest increases in temperature and humidity in the spring and summer will not lead to a decline in cases. They say it underlines the need for extensive public health interventions to control the disease.

Rally 

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Interview:

'Migrant labourers now have an opportunity to punish their employers'

Irudaya Rajan of the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram on how urban migration patterns will change post-Covid-19.

A woman and her baby wait for a bus to take them to a railway station in New Delhi. | Adnan Abidi/Reuters

The Covid-19 crisis has forced India to finally acknowledge the migrant. For decades, millions of workers have moved from state to state, and some to shores abroad, looking for opportunities and livelihoods. The international scope of this pandemic has ensured that no section of people is left unaffected. The scale of the issue may vary from state to state or city to city, but none is left unscathed.

Images of millions of Indians trudging across hundreds of kilometres – some even losing their lives in the attempt – back home have brought forth the severity of the ruthless lockdown. Similarly, the economic impact of Indians being forced to return from abroad amidst collapsing economies and a widening health scare is expected to be felt in the coming months.

“In a sense, this is a refugee crisis now and not merely a migrant crisis,” Irudaya Rajan, faculty at the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram, told *Quartz* during an extensive interview. Rajan has tracked India’s migration trends for over 35 years. “We are finally acknowledging that migrants exist in huge numbers,” he said.



Edited excerpts from the interview:

What’s your general sense of India’s migrant crisis today?

In this context, I consider only migrant workers to have been affected directly as a group by Covid-19 because they make money only by moving. That has completely stopped. I don’t think policymakers visualised the extent of the issue. We see them

everywhere: hotels, small industries, construction, metro stations, tourism. Yet, we never imagined migrant workers as a group big enough to protest or to be taken seriously. We underestimated their ability to unite or organise. They were not allowed to unionise even in states like West Bengal or Kerala. Now they have come under the limelight.



Governments, policymakers, economists, and others now know they cannot take migration lightly or migrants for a ride.

You're saying India grossly underestimated its migrant labourers?

That's right. We have underestimated the role migrants played in the Indian economy. We have failed to recognise their contribution. We knew they existed but never acknowledged their quantum.

My estimate is that close to 500 million Indians are today internal migrants – either living in a place they were not born in or did not live in six months ago. Of these, the ones mainly affected by this lockdown are the worker migrants. These would be at least 30% of the total migrant population. So we are talking about 150 million-plus people in the country who move from their home state to another for work. They move to a place, earn there, send back money home, and move on to a new place. We have no studies on this segment. They weren't covered in policy circles. We talk only about smart cities...now we realise that cities need migrants.

How will this battle faced by India's migrant labourers ultimately turn out?

In the short term, they will lose. In the long term, they will win. Because can you imagine a city like Mumbai without migrants? In fact, migrants constitute some 30%-40% of the economies of many cities. You cannot run the economy without them. You can reopen industries, but how will they function without

migrant workers. One can already feel the scarcity in Kerala.

Have the state and central governments responded well to migrants' plight?

The response has not been systematic. It's been a piecemeal approach. We are still talking about the immediate outcome of Covid-19: live or die. Only after a while will we talk about livelihood. Then automatically migrant activities will become an important topic.

Do you see migrants receiving monetary help from the government?

Every migrant in the country ought to be paid at least Rs 20,000 for two months for the time and wages lost. No questions should be asked. They should only have to prove their migrant status. This need not be done by only the central government. It should be a tripartite measure: the central government, the receiving states to which the migrants have travelled, and those from where they hail. The relief money contributed to various relief funds is not only for ventilators. People also die when they don't have anything to eat. Nobody should go without a proper meal because they had no work.

Once things normalise, do you see migrants returning to cities, given their disillusionment?

I think post-Covid-19, the normal migration corridors are likely to change. Long-distance migration will be affected. Somebody coming from the Northeast to Kerala in the South may not come anymore. Because distance is now an issue. It will also depend on how they were treated during the lockdown. Migrant labourers now have an opportunity to punish their employers. Can you give them a proper salary when they come back? Employers have to decide, not migrants. Acknowledge your mistakes.

Can private employers afford to make such offers, given the huge blackout they are facing?

They should look for help from the government. There is supposed to be a Rs 20 lakh crore package announced by the prime minister. They [private employers] should not exploit workers, exploit the government instead.

Why should migrants travel to faraway cities and starve there? They would rather starve in their own villages. Don't underestimate the migrants' intelligence. They are risk-takers. They are war heroes in their homes, just that they are fighting poverty.

Now I'd like to shift the focus to those returning from abroad. What are their numbers?

India has somewhere close to 20 million international migrants. Half of these are in six Gulf countries: Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Out of these some 2.5 million are from the Southern state of Kerala. So Kerala will be badly affected. The other states are also likely to be affected, but Kerala has more concentration. India received \$80 billion as remittances from abroad, yet only the chief minister of Kerala wrote to the central government for help to the external migrants.

You had once explained how gaps left by people leaving India were filled by internal migrants –or replacement migrants. Now that this process is in reverse, how will things unfold?

Overall, I expect some 300,000 Indians to return from the Gulf by September-December because of

the Covid-19 crisis. Of these, at least 100,000 will be what I call the eventual returnees. These are people who feel they have made enough money and now it is time for them to return for good. They probably will have some money. They need viable projects to invest and earn returns for the remaining part of their lives. That is missing.

Another 100,000 of these will re-migrate. I have seen this happening post the 2008 crisis, during the Gulf wars, during the Nitaqat crisis in Saudi Arabia. Now, this re-migration need not be to only the Gulf. There are 200+ countries in the world. Why only talk about the Gulf? The government should train these people to think beyond the Gulf.

After all, Covid-19 doesn't mean the end of migration itself. It will also open fresh opportunities for migration in interesting new destinations, including America. Because economies will always need migrants, irrespective of all the election-time talk by people like Donald Trump.

And if people want to re-migrate, they need upgraded skills. The Skill India project can be helpful there. So suppose someone returns in September from the Gulf, they will have, say six months to upgrade their skills, and then they can re-migrate to, say, Japan or Indonesia or Kenya, by next summer.

These are the new ideas to draw, lessons for us to learn from the Covid-19 crisis.

How prepared is India to handle the returning migrants?

I don't think we are prepared. A big package has to come from the central government for the returning migrants' rehabilitation, re-migration, and reintegration – the last one because some people might have lost everything in the crisis. No state is talking about all this, except Kerala.

This article first appeared on Quartz. <https://scroll.in/article/962366/interview-migrant-labourers-now-have-an-opportunity-to-punish-their-employers>



5 Important Points for Organizations to Consider Post Lockdown Period



1. Make sure your workplace is safe and sanitized

The first and foremost thing that you should do as an employer is to make sure that all your working locations are safe and properly sanitized ahead of marking the first day after the lockdown. For this, instruct the cleaners to use alcohol-based disinfectants, which are proven against many germs and viruses, including the COVID-19. Place hand sanitizers and tissues at all the common areas around the workplace. At the same time, you must also ensure that these things are refilled or replaced from time to time.

Along with this, you must rearrange your workplaces so that there's at least one meter of space between each employee. And also, encourage all your employees and other staff members to wear a face mask at all times and practice proper etiquette while they cough or sneeze.

2. Classifying your employees with respiratory ailments or other diseases

Even though every one of us is equally vulnerable to the COVID-19, it possesses a threat, especially to those who have any respiratory illness or are suffering from chronic diseases. With this, the other important task for you is to classify your employees who might be suffering from such conditions. Here, it would be better for you to ask

these employees to continue with their work from home schedules to keep them as well as the others safe.

Doing this would also allow you to minimize the congestion at the workplace, making adequate space for the employees.

3. Arranging safe transportation means for your employees

If you are familiar with the term "Fomites," then you must already know why I am suggesting you this point. For those who don't know, fomites are the objects that are very likely to spread the virus when someone touches or comes in contact with it, and public transportation is one of the hotspots for fomites in general. Employees who use their own vehicles are still relatively safe compared to those who use alternative means to get to their workplace. Hence, you should definitely consider arranging some transportation medium for your employees to mitigate the risk for them coming in contact with the virus.

4. Implementing measures for ensuring psychological safety

The lockdown days have been really tough as we are all

caged within the four walls of our house. However, from an employee's point of view, these days have helped them spend some quality time with their families while being at work at the same time. However, coming out of this period is not going to be an easy affair, as there'll still be a cloud of uncertainty regarding the pandemic. And this is going to affect the productivity of your employees at the workplace severely. Therefore, you should take all possible measures to ensure that your employees feel psychologically safe while at work.

To support this, you can facilitate them with access to mental health experts. Or you can also organize informal discussion sessions with all to share their experiences and cheer up each other in these times of distress.

5. Minimizing all business-related travels across the organization

Another point to add to your post lockdown strategy checklist is to curb down all non-essential business travels for everyone in the organization. Initiating lockdown and practicing social distancing are only temporary solutions to slow down the spread of COVID-19. So, even after the lockdown is lifted, the risk of COVID-19 will still persist. Therefore, you must make it a point and also encourage everyone to continue with their online collaborations. Not only this work arrangement brings better efficiency, but it'll also help the organization bring down some of its expenses and be future-ready.

Final Words

The lockdown happening due to COVID-19 across the world won't be staying for a very long time. Many businesses have already collapsed during this period, and with every passing day, everyone is growing anxious about when they can go back to their usual way of life. Though forcing people to stay inside their homes looks like a harsh decision,



but it was vital to stop the spread of the virus. Even if normalcy returns, it'll be a very faint one until there emerges a cure for this disease. Ultimately, it is all on us and what measures we take that would keep ourselves safe in this crisis.

The above were a few points that I believe every employer should consider for keeping everyone safe in the workplace during the post lockdown period. Also, we would welcome you to add more to it if you have some better concerns that should be addressed by the organization in the comments section below.

Working as a Content Marketer at Vantage Circle, Angshuman always stays curious and is passionate about learning new things. Got any question? Drop a mail at editor@vantagecircle.com



REFLECTION

Enjoy COFFEE AND NOT CUP



A GROUP of alumni, highly established in their careers, got together to visit their old university professor. Conversation soon turned into complaints about stress in work and life. Offering his guests coffee, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of coffee and an assortment of cups porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite - telling them to help themselves to hot coffee.

When all the students had a cup of coffee in hand, the professor said:

“If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is but normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. What all of you really wanted was coffee, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups and were eyeing each other’s cups.

Now if life is coffee, then the jobs, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain Life, but the quality of Life doesn’t change. Some times, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the coffee in it.”

Don’t let the cups drive you... Enjoy the coffee instead...

Rally 

Reflection = Reflection + Action



WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS

Aicuf bids farewell to Fr Jesu Benjamine SJ, who has been our AICUF House Director since three years taking care of the maintenance of the AICUF House at our National Secretariat as well as Fr Claude's Hostel at Egmore. Besides he also travelled around to give talks on tribal issues and tribal rights. He will be handing over charge to Fr Partha Sarathi SJ, present Tamil Nadu State adviser. With grateful hearts I remember all that you have done to AICUF and I wish you all the best for your new assignment as Director of Social Centre at Dumka.

With warm greetings

AICUF welcomes Fr Partha Sarathi SJ, to take charge as the House Director of AICUF as well as Tamil Nadu AICUF state adviser who will take care of two provinces, Chennai and Madurai, in Tamil Nadu.

I thank in a special manner FR Joy Pradeep Rodriguez SJ outgoing state adviser of Karnataka AICUF who is handing over charge to Fr. Joel Praveen Fernandes SJ. National Aicuf cordially welcomes Fr. Joel Praveen Fernandes SJ, the new Karnataka State Adviser.

AICUF Colleges Reaching out to Migrants

