

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF STATE RESPONSE

Veena Kukreja

Abstract

The world is in the throes of Coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 has posed an unprecedented challenge for India, given a large scale of population, poor health system, and the pre-pandemic precarious situation of the economy. Unlike the United Kingdom and Singapore, India did not enact COVID-19 Law and relied on National Disaster Management Act, 2005, and colonial Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 to tackle the Coronavirus pandemic. The nationwide lockdown has been governments' central strategy to combat COVID-19, which remains the biggest and the most stringent lockdown of the world till the date. The misplaced prioritisation of lockdown as an exit strategy vis-a-vis alternative vision of public health has contradictory implications in terms of administrative centrality and law and order oriented response. The sudden and unplanned lockdown led to the migrant workers crisis and economic crisis. The migrant workers have had to bear the worst burden of the epidemic in terms of lives and livelihood. The outbreak of COVID-19 not only triggered health crisis but also unfolded/amplified the vulnerabilities of the poor and unequipped public health system. The pandemic has impinged on the country's economy in multiple ways and its legacy will be carried over to the post-corona period. In view of downgrading India's growth rate projections, government relief packages seem insufficient to stimulate the economy. It is imperative for the government to develop a coherent economic strategy and policies to mitigate the social and economic fallout of the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Economic downturn, Supply chain, Informal sector, Health care, Financial institution, Fiscal policy, Social cohesion, Centre-state collaboration.

The global community today is in the middle of a severe challenge of an unprecedented health emergency in the wake of COVID-19, which has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Transcending the boundaries of nation-states, this highly contiguous corona virus has engendered the lives of millions of people cutting across several continents. The entire world is passing through great uncertainty as nobody knows when the transmission of the virus will slow down or when we will have a vaccine for the virus. The global COVID-19 crisis is plunging the world into a socio-economic and financial crisis of an unimaginable scale, in addition to the acute health crisis.

The world has witnessed several pandemics such as the Spanish Flu of 1918, outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Virus in 2003 in China, the Swine Origin HINI in 2009 in Mexico, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome or MERS in 2012, and Ebola in Africa in 2013, leaving Europe and the US unaffected. All of these individually have been pretty severe episodes. However, what distinguishes the novel corona virus pandemic with earlier pandemics is that it has become truly global. The new corona virus, which originated in the city of Wuhan, in the Hubei province of China in December, 2019, caused a rapid and widespread outbreak in Italy as well as in almost all countries of the world, situated in distant continents.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest and the worst crisis of the history because it is a threefold crisis – health, humanitarian, and economic. As many and more people are getting infected around the world, the health care systems of the countries have come under severe strain and unfolded their vulnerabilities. Not only the health system but economies around the world are also trembling under the shock due to sharply restricted economic activities, growing recession and increasing uncertainties. Trillions of dollars of economic outputs have been wiped out, most countries will take years to return to the pre-corona virus levels, and billions of people are confronting a shrunken future. The current economic crisis seems to be worse than the Great Depression of the 1930s, as it is causing unseen disruption in both demand and supply. Impact of Covid-19 outbreak has strongly been felt by international trade and global supply chain. Scholar and experts are speculating that the pandemic may lead to collapse of multilateralism (Matto and Narlikar, 2020; Bagchi, 2020; Ortega, 2020), and rise of anti-globalisation activities along with sub-nationalism. Therefore, scholars and experts around the world are raising concerns that the COVID-19 crisis will slow down the process of globalisation, and the world will enter in a de-globalised era.

State Response to the Pandemic in India

Unlike the UK and Singapore, India did not enact COVID-19 law and preferred to deal with this challenge under the existing laws – some of them of colonial vintage, and some more recent wide and vaguely worded clauses. The response to COVID-19 in India remains purely law and order oriented/centric. At both the federal and state levels, the Indian government has addressed the pandemic primarily through executive orders. India is a parliamentary-federal democracy with a bicameral legislature and a judiciary empowered to review administrative and legislative actions for compliance with India's Constitution. The advent of COVID-19, however, has seen many of these checks eroded or undermined (Bhatia, 2020).

Laws Governing Lockdown

The federal government, often referred to as the 'Central' government, has invoked the Disaster Management Act of 2005 (DMA), while several state governments have invoked the Epidemic Disease Act of 1897 (EDA). Both laws contain broad umbrella clauses that allow the Central and state governments to take any measure they deem necessary to address a disaster or epidemic. India's executive authorities have used these two laws to impose a nationwide lockdown – the exact legal definition of which remains unclear – as well as to seal state borders, suspend transportation, services and individual movement and justify extensive quarantining and social distancing requirements. Because these powers have formal statutory backing, parliament (the deliberative organ) is bypassed and the courts, while continuing to function at limited capacity, do not at present seem willing or able to subject the states' action to vigorous judicial review. Invoking of the DMA by the union government and EDA, by states raises question about the viability of these acts to address a 21st century problem. In case of India, ad hoc and reactive rule-making reveals the lack of coordination between the union and state governments (Shunmugasundaram, 2020).

The nationwide lockdown has been central to the government's strategy to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. India recorded the first case of the disease on 30 January 2020. Since then the cases increased steadily and significantly. The government failed to understand that corona is a 'new' kind of pandemic. The Indian State misperceived the corona as 'foreign' disease not likely to affect the Indian population to a great extent (Samaddar, 2020b: 2). Therefore, policy change was not imperative. Lockdown appeared

to be the only option because of losing on the critical lead time, lack of preparedness, testing capacity and confidence to generate an adequate surveillance response. In order to curb the spread of the virus, the government of India announced a nationwide lockdown from 25 March 2020 (on the notice of 4 hours), which continued for about two months. It was the biggest and the most stringent lockdown enforced in the world. With businesses closed, supply chains disrupted, railways and inter-state bus services suspended, timelines extended and contracts terminated, this exercise has caused the organised sector unprecedented economic losses. In the unorganised sector there has been a complete breakdown with little or no legal recourse for those who are affected. While the lockdown aimed to contain the COVID-19, 'a legal and legislative audit of this exercise has evaded scrutiny so far' (Shunmugasundaram, 2020).

The lockdown was implemented by the state governments and district authorities on the directions of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs under the DMA of 2005, which was intended to provide for the effective management of natural disasters and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Under the Act, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was set up under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the National Executive Committee (NEC), chaired by the Home Secretary. On 24 March 2020, the NDMA and NEC issued orders directing the Union Ministries, state governments and authorities to take effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and laid out guidelines illustrating which establishments would be closed and which services suspended during the lockdown.

Taking a cue from the guidelines, the State governments and authorities exercised powers under the archaic/colonial EDA of 1897 to issue further directions, which exhibits the lack of requisite diligence and responsiveness of government authorities in providing novel and innovative policy solution to resolve this contemporary health crisis (D'souza 2020; Shunmugasundaram 2020).

On the contrary, the UK enacted a comprehensive Corona Virus Act, 2020, to handle the COVID-19 crisis including registration of healthcare professionals, temporary closure of educational institutions, audio-visual facilities for criminal proceedings, powers to restrict gatherings and financial assistance to industry. Similarly, Singapore passed the Infectious Disease Regulations 2020, which provides for issuance of stay orders which can send 'at risk individuals' to government specified accommodation facility.

Both the U.K.'s and Singapore's laws set out unambiguous conditions and legally binding obligations. However, in India, both

Houses of Parliament functioned till 23 March 2020, when they were adjourned *sine die*. In spite of number of interventions regarding corona virus by opposition members through the session, the Union government shied away from enacting a COVID-19-specific legislation to address all the issues pre-emptively. In fact, lack of a well-planned and proactive policy was revealed in the way migrant workers were treated. The flip-flop of orders regarding inter-state movement left the fate of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers to be handled by district administrations with inadequate resources. This suggests the absence of co-ordination between the Union and the state governments.

The state response to the pandemic reflects its internal fault lines in dealing with a crisis situation such as the COVID-19. The place of migrant labour in the crisis manifests these fault lines in a dense manner. With the invocation of the DMA 2005, the template of managing the pandemic in India was set. The law-and-order-oriented policies took the place of those on people's health. The measures on the novel corona virus epidemic stemmed from such a response.

The crisis of COVID-19 required protection of life through an alternative vision of public health. The public health crisis cannot be managed through colonial EDA. DMA based on the model of centralisation, massive surveillance, punishment and dispossession of the poorer classes of resources of life. DMA Act adds to the coercive powers of the state and tends to impoverish public health (Samaddar, 2020b: 16-17). The DMA has a command structure disaster management authorities at the central (NDMA), state, and district levels, who are required to formulate disaster management. The fact that the Act does not mention epidemics or Public Health Emergencies (PHEs) makes it clear that the focus of the DMA is on natural and man-made calamities as opposed to PHEs (D'souza, 2020).

The range of policy problems and debacles in handling the COVID-19 crisis 'arises from the ignorance of the phenomenon of mobility of the virus. The 'idea the threat is from outside and has been the basis of a law-and-order approach to cope with the epidemic' (Samaddar, 2020b: 3). This policy perspective reveals the inherent contradiction of such an approach, which contributed to the making of the 'migrant crisis' and the 'public health crisis' in India. These two crises met each other in the backdrop of the third crisis, namely, the general crisis of economic and particularly financial crisis in the country. Ironically, the governments and the opposition both ignored the specific moment of the COVID-19 crisis as the meeting time of three separate crises (ibid.).

The Most Stringent Lockdown: War on the Informal Labour

India, according to Harsh Mander and Amitanshu Verma, witnessed 'the harshest lockdown in the world coupled with one of the smallest relief packages' (Mander and Verma, 2020: 1). Lockdown measures have disproportionately affected migrant workers (Kapoor, 2020). It has left in its trail catastrophic sufferings imposed by the state on the migrant labour. Economist and professor of Development Studies, Barbara Harris-White (2020) depicts the lockdown a 'declaration of war' on the informal labour through 'policy inaction' towards their survival.

Lockdown requires isolation, social distancing and sanitisation, which are not possible in congested areas of slums. If five-10 people live in a room, how is isolation possible? Frequent washing of hands is required but how is that possible without clean water and soap? In this context, Arun Kumar aptly remarks that 'while lockdown works for the middle classes and the well-off sections, who have the facility to work from home, it is next to impossible for the poor unless the state steps in and make arrangements. There has to be free testing and hospitalisation, provision of essentials of life and clean water wherever the workers are. The prerequisite for a successful lockdown were not put in place enough, consequently the lockdown has been only partially implemented, allowing the disease to spread' (Kumar, 2020: 7).

One of the most visible consequences of COVID-19 pandemic is the migration of people from city to villages. The invisible became visible. The Indian government statistics had not computed the exact number of migrants swarming the city. The 2011 Census puts it at 450 million who have migrated to different parts of the country, though it leaves out the short-term migrations. Using railways data and cohorts-based migration between 2011 and 2016, the Economic Survey of India has computed as annual average flow of close to 9 million people migrating between the states significantly higher than the census estimates (*Economic Survey of India, 2017*).

Migration is not a new phenomenon. What distinguishes the old from the new migration is the systematicity of movement coupled with unobtrusive logistics of management of migrants, on the one hand, and the viability and surety of returning home at the time of crisis, on the other. The returning home in the COVID-19 is one such example. The city's opulence could not sustain the migrants, thereby unveiling the rickety and unjust resource distributive systems, namely — health, education, wages, and welfare schemes — of the

economy leading to reverse migration. It is the biggest ever reverse migration witnessed in the history of India. According to Amitabh Kundu and Mohanan's (2017) estimation, among 22 million people destabilized 12 million have returned home. According to another source, about 30 million people or 15-20 per cent of the total migrants have returned. The informal sectors that account for 93 per cent of migrants' employment suffered significant casualties¹.

The countrywide lockdown to contain the virus relegated the migrant labour towards a pathetic situation marked by hunger, homelessness and unforeseen miseries. According to a Survey of Migrant Workers Action Network (SWAN) conducted in middle of April 2020 (survey sample 1,11,159 migrant workers) revealed that 90 per cent of them were not paid their wages in various states, 96 per cent did not get ration from government outlets and 70 per cent did not get cooked food during lockdown² (*The Hindu*, 20 April 2020).

The lockdown drove the migrant labour on the margins of further alienation, insecurity and humiliation. In the first few days of the nationwide lockdown, the country witnessed a mass reversal of migrant workers from cities to villages posing humanitarian and health challenge as well as an unprecedented logistical nightmare. The invisible migrant workers suddenly became visible into mainstream media with recurring images of unending processions of workers deprived overnight of work, shelter and money marooned in cities, facing hunger and health risks, and leaving for their villages on foot for thousands of kms.

Trudging long distances with their families – men carrying young children on their shoulders, the women with their belongings hoisted on their heads – going without food in their bellies for long stretches, often-risking the ire of policemen, with no relief in sight, they have been reduced to the status of detritus (Singh et.al, 2020:2). These migrant labourers, while walking on foot, suffered significant casualties on the way. It also shows a light on their Dickensian working condition, exposing the dark underbelly of India's labour industry (Kumar, 2020; Lal, 2020). Reports have highlighted how the underpaid workers remain outside the ambit of labour laws, with no social security nets to boot (Chaudhary *et al.*; Das, 2020; Bales, 2020).

In this context Ranbir Samaddar contends: 'for the state, the migrant workers are a nightmare for the task of logistically organising the society. For the migrant workers the programme of logistical reorganisation of society is a nightmare. This is true of capitalist economy in general. It is true of India also. The logistically

organising society meant closure, closure of the modern economy, course of the border movement of bodies, and community living spaces. By constructing borders in the 'economy of life', the state began erasure of people, made dispensable. How do we understand the simultaneity of visibility, presence in economy and absence in the formal sector?' (Samaddar 2020a: 14-15).

In sum, large-scale reverse migration has opened up a Pandora box of how the role of labour viewed in India's growth trajectory. As Indira Hirway and Neha Shah remarked in their article, Labour scarcely makes it to the 'neo-liberal agenda. 'Neo-liberal policies do not directly address labour and employment in the sense that these factors are not at their core. Instead, their benefits were expected to trickle down to labour through the functioning of the market' (Hirway and Shah, 2011). Thus, it is also true that the adverse effects of the neo-liberal regime on labour are slow in receiving adequate and proactive attention.

The ruling classes ignore the right to dignified life to the labour and argue that the marginal improvement in material conditions of many workers is enough. They even imply that the workers ought to be grateful for this slight unequal economic system. In the ruling economic ideology, equity is not high on the agenda. 'Consequently, neither the state nor the businesses grant workers their rights. For example, large numbers do not get a minimum wage or social security or protective gear at worksites. The fruits of development, in the last 75 years, especially since 1991, have been cornered by businesses by hook or by crook. They have made profits not only in white but huge sums in black too'³ (Kumar, 2020).

Weakening of Feeble Labour Law Protection

The challenge of the pandemic is compounded by specific policies of dispossession and derogation of labour rights. The sudden and unplanned enforcement of the lockdown without any support measures for labour migrants had made the conditions of the latter extremely insecure, unsafe and chaotic. In this context, one scholar contends 'the condition has worsened due to state negligence and apathy towards migrants also xenophobic attitude of communities towards returnee migrants' (Samaddar, 2020b: 20). One can observe the crisis of the labour migrants at three spheres: at destination, transit, and at source. Appropriate policy responses needed at all three spheres in order to ensure safety, security and dignity of labour migrants the governments did not ensure rent free accommodation for labour migrants, pay of wages and access 'legal entitlements' to

public distribution system, cash transfers to the migrant workers have been few and far between. There is no policy to look after while ensuring their food, shelter and other minimum needs. There is likewise no policy to ensure their smooth and safe transportation back home. There is no mandatory registration of workers, so that their needs could have been attended in time of crisis like this (ibid.).

The Central government announced on 9 April 2020 that Rs 3000 crores had been distributed to 20 million registered construction workers. Also, the government announced free foodgrains to migrant workers and concessional credit to farmers (*Times of India*, 10 April 2020, *The Hindu*, 10 April 2020). The finance minister announced 8 crore migrants will get 5 kg of grains and 1 kg of pulses free for two months (now extended up to November).

However, government announcements reveal its piecemeal approach to resolve the problem of migrant workers. A large number of construction workers fall under the category of the migrants, and like many of the migrant workers they are not registered, and are thus left out of the cash transfer scheme offered by the government. The same thing happened with food distribution. The government announced free ration for 3 months for 80 million people who had got ration cards. But the migrant workers have their ration cards in their home states, and thus when needed access to food in their respective workplace they were deprived of access to food. Thus, benefit of cash support and access to Public Distribution System (PDS), the stranded migrant workers were forced to come out from their shelters and take to the roads.

The existing pieces of labour legislation such as Contract Labour Regulation and Abolition Act 1970, Inter-State Migrant Worker Act 1979, The National Disaster Management Act 2005 and The Labour Code 2019 are merely paper tiger and have no relevance in addressing the current crisis faced by the migrants thrown out from the urban centres. It reveals the passive role of the Indian state in relation to migrant labour (Sen, 2020: 3-4). This manifests a close alliance between big capital and the ruling class indicated in official policies to protect the interest of big capital.

Now using COVID-19 as a shield/pretext workers' right are being further curtailed. The even more cruel paradox is that instead of being shamed by their unreasonable neglect of labour rights of migrant labour many state governments tried to use pandemic to further weaken the feeble protections which law currently provides (Mander and Verma, 2020: 6; Sood, Paaritosh, 2020). In Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat at least 14 labour laws like the Minimum Wages Act and Industrial Dispute Act are being suspended

for three years in an effort to attract capital and revive economic activity.

Even before the new labour laws have been passed in the parliament, some states like UP, MP and Gujarat suspended existing labour laws and allowed the employers to have a free run their respective businesses. The workers would be forced now to work 12-hour shifts, six days a week ruling out the provisions under Factory Act 1948, of paying overtime at double rate of normal rate for the extra hours. By further excluding desperate, vulnerable workers from the few feeble labour rights protections, this has been labelled by Shah and Lerche as their 'super exploitation' (Shah and Lerche, 2020).

Unlike other countries such as Germany, Italy and Thailand, the sudden and unplanned lockdown in India did not help in containing the spread of the corona virus. Infection cases kept on increasing despite India being in lockdown. India soon became the world's hotspot for the COVID-19 pandemic as infection cases surged within weeks. On September 7, India overtook Brazil with 4.2 million confirmed cases to become the country with the second-highest number of confirmed cases in India. If the current trend continues, India may soon become the world's worst hit country, surpassing the US. At the time of writing this article the capital city Delhi has turned into a corona capital as it is making new records of infected cases virtually every day. While the world is currently witnessing the second wave of infection, India has not been able to flatten the first wave curve.

Corona Virus: The Biggest Crisis of India's Health Care System

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic provides insights into India's poor and unequipped health structure as well as deep and wide chasms in the public health, medical profession and the structure of care. India's public healthcare system is one of the most underfunded in the world. India's public health system is relatively weaker than other countries. The government spends only 1.5 per cent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the health sector as a result of which the system remains grossly under-prepared to deal with a health crisis such as this (*Economic Survey of India, 2019-20*). In contrast with other developing countries, such as Brazil, which spends 7.5 per cent of its annual GDP on health, Bhutan which was allocated 3.6 per cent and Bangladesh which dedicates 2.2 per cent. Among developed nation, South Korea has kept its healthcare

expenditure at a whopping 8.1 per cent. Japan 10.9 per cent and US at 8.5 per cent.

India has a severe shortage of healthcare workers. According to the Health Ministry, data released in October 2019, there is one doctor for every 11,082 people, which is more than 10 times the doctor-patient ratio mandated by the WHO. In rural areas, this doctor-patient ratio is as low as 1:10926 doctors as per National Health Profile 2019.

According to data from the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development available for India for 2019, India has 0.7 beds for 1000 people compared with 0.87 in Bangladesh, 1.1 in Indonesia, 2011 in Chile, 20.73 in Turkey, 1.38 in Mexico, 4.34 in China and 8.05 in Russia (*The Indian Express*, 30 March 2020). Besides, private hospitals now account for 51 per cent of the hospital beds in India, which in any case is not affordable for the India masses.

After Independence, the Indian government initially gave importance to eradication of Malaria, triple vaccine, small pox eradication, etc. Yet within no time, privatization of healthcare system, medical insurance became the high priority and in the grab of public-private partnership, the State handed over resources to private players.

Public healthcare system in India, since 1980s, has been reeling under the impact of neo-liberal policies. The State has retreated from public health, and public education, and manifest/exhibit an all-round failure to keep up with demands for public services. The new managerial policies are promoting contractual and part-time jobs, privatization of care facility and shrinking of municipal services. In sum, political paradigm of neo-liberalism has replaced public policies with social policies geared towards privatization and deregulation of the market. All these have had impinged on the condition of care. The political economy of health has never been as paramount as in the battle against the corona virus.

In the 2019 Global Health Security Index, which measures pandemic preparedness for countries based on their ability to handle the crisis, India ranked 57, lower than the US at 1, and the UK at 2, Brazil at 22 and Italy at 31, suggesting it is more vulnerable to the pandemic that have seen a high number of fatalities so far (Singh *et al.*, 2020).

The lockdown was primarily intended to curb the spread of infection and buy time to prepare the health system to put together a plan of how to deal with the outbreak over the case-load stated accelerating. The two months of countrywide lockdown didn't

improve dramatically public health infrastructure. To the extent possible, the lockdown period was used to ramp up testing, contact-tracing, isolating confirmed patients in designated Quarantine centres and setting up treatment facilities including makeshift hospitals. However, the health care system continues to be overwhelmed by the rising number of patients/exponentially every day especially in the worst affected states like Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat and West Bengal.

Even much before the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian Public Hospitals were facing an acute shortage of beds and healthcare workers. Although the private healthcare industry has boomed mostly in urban areas affordability remains an important issue.

Global pandemic has put the healthcare system under severe strain and has also been bogged down by the shortage of essentials like PPEs, Ventilators, ICUs, bed, medicines and oxygen, therefore the government has also to come out with home quarantine policy. As the number of infections surges in India, patients are finding it difficult to get admitted to corona virus – designated hospitals.

At the same time, 'the metamorphosis of public health' into a mission to clean cities has resulted in a crisis of public health infrastructure in the city itself. The absence of decentralized public care system down to municipal ward and panchayat has failed to yield desired results in terms of identification and emerged as major hurdle in the battle against the COVID-19. The corona virus is mobile, but our public health structure is 'centralized' and 'static' (Samaddar, 2020: 7).

The current scenario reveals poor planning and lopsidedness on the government's part. Many experts have reiterated that the four phases of nationwide lockdown, was borrowed time to make frantic preparations. There was no way to control the virus, but the lockdown period massively failed due to misplaced prioritization. In view of the exponential rise of corona cases, policy paradox in health crisis management manifests/exhibits/reveals overemphasis on lockdown and an under – emphasis on the need for care, of the caregivers, security and safety of care workers, and scaling up the existing infrastructure by increasing number of staff, beds, and ventilators, ICUs and corona wards.

Even though higher testing is critical to contain the virus outbreak, testing facilities in India have been beefed up only since mid-August. Measured on a per capita basis, India is still far behind other countries in number of tests.

Except for the COVID-19 case fatality rate (CFR) witnessing a

decline, the rest of the indicators are strikingly worrisome in India. Experts believe that the CFR is not a meaningful metric for India as it does not capture the true levels of transmission to the low testing rate and age factor. Besides this, many deaths may go unreported in rural areas.

More worrisome is that the corona virus is fast spreading to rural and remote areas of the country that lack testing, treatment and tracing infrastructure. In the absence of basic health infrastructure containing the spread of corona virus is much difficult in the rural hinterland.

In this ‘tumultuous situation’, during the lockdown the migrant workers are the most sufferers of the pandemic and in health management crisis. They received no support from the public health infrastructure in the places they were working or when finally reached ‘home’. They were treated as they do not belong to ‘public’. They were deprived of health insurance, minimum medical assistance card, and social security card or welfare measure (Samaddar 2020b: 8).

The absence of strong public health system and PHEs legislation in India has resulted in extreme containment measures coupled with coordination and communication failures, leading to the large-scale displacement of labourers, inadequate supply of personal protection equipment to health care workers, misuse of police power and patients absconding from isolation facilities (D’ Souza, 2020).

In sum, COVID-19 has exposed the deep public crisis in India and requires an alternative policy approach based on decentralized, flexible and inclusive system of public health.

Life vs Livelihood Debate

In India the life versus livelihood debate also played out, with the government first announcing that life would be prioritized over livelihood, which later changed to an equal importance being given to life and livelihood (*Livemint*, 11 April 2020). By mid-May the centre was keen to resume economic activities, while the Chief Ministers had mixed reactions (Sharma, 2020). The lifting of lockdown under market pressure is being presented as the trade-off between life and livelihood. It was argued that workers without work and income will die of hunger⁴ (Yadav, 2020). The idea of ‘herd immunity’ was smuggled in. The argument for ‘herd immunity’ – when the majority will develop immunity to the disease – was considered inevitable. The argument was put forward that building herd immunity is the

only long-term strategy for coping with the pandemic, since ‘can no longer be contained, can always surge again. This may involve in the process of building immunity some deaths. But these deaths are unavoidable and therefore ‘affordable’ (Samaddar, 2020b: 10-11).

‘Herd immunity’ has been depicted as epidemiological neo-liberalism by Isabel Frey as it ‘relies on the assumption that an epidemic is best overcome by leaving it unregulated. But like neo-liberalism it results in violence against the weak and the poor, elderly and disabled people... Herd immunity not just bad science or bad policy. It is biological warfare, many people will die because of it, government won’t take responsibility for it’ (Frey, 2020). It is significant to note the UK experienced with herd immunity but, as the number of cases and deaths spiralled, policy had to be reverted.

Fallout of the Pandemic on Economy: Unprecedented Economic Blow

COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the Indian economy into a tailspin. Coupled with a humanitarian crisis, the COVID-19 epidemic has brutally amplified/magnified the worsened existing vulnerabilities in the Indian economy. The haphazardly implemented lockdown has had a significant devastating effect on the economy. India’s unemployment rate was recorded high of 23.5 per cent in April 2020. The jobless rate in urban area was 24.9 per cent, while that in rural was 22.5 per cent. During the lockdown, an estimated 14 crore (140 million) people lost employment while salaries were cut for many others. As far as the job losses are concerned, the COVID-19 epidemic has no parallel in the post-independent India (Sharma Yogima, 2020). The Consumer Pyramids Household Surveys carried out by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy show a sharp rise in unemployment rates in the range of 8.35 per cent to 23.52 per cent during April-August 2020 (cited in CMIE, 2020; and *The Economic Times*, 22 March 2020).

More than 45 per cent of households across the nation have reported an income drop as compared to the previous year (*Scroll* in 24 April 2020). The Indian economy was expected to lose over Rs 32,000 crore (US\$ 4.5 billion) every day during the first 21-days of complete lockdown, which was declared following the Corona virus outbreak (*Businessline*, 2 April, 2020 and PTI, 25 March, 2020). Up to 53 per cent of business in the country were projected to be significantly affected.

The countrywide lockdown has brought nearly all economic activities to an abrupt halt and disruption of demand and supply

forces. The pandemic has affected all levels of the society but is the informal workers including migrants are the worse casualties with almost no economic activity particularly in urban areas, the lockdown led to large scale losses of jobs and incomes for these workers (Dev and Sengupta, 2020: 12; Das, 2020).

Out of work and facing an uncertain future, an estimated 10 million migrant workers returned to their native places after the imposition of lockdown. What is shocking is that neither the central government nor state governments have data of migrant workers who lost their jobs or lives during the lockdown.

The Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), which created more than 90 per cent of jobs in India, employing over 114 million people and contributing 30 per cent of the GDP (Pandey and Pillai, 2020), are at the risk of having severe cash crunch due to lockdown. Although all businesses have been affected by the pandemic, the MSME sector would be particularly worse by reduced cash flows caused by the nationwide lockdown. Their supply chains have been disrupted, and they have been adversely affected by the exodus of migrant workers, restrictions in the availability of new materials, by the disruptions to exports and also by the widespread travel bans, closure of malls, hotels, theatres and education institutions. As a large number of micro and small enterprises have started shutting their businesses the biggest worry is that millions of jobs could be lost permanently, which in turn, will dampen consumption and will have a knock-on effect on the whole economy (Choudhary *et.al*, 2020: 175-176). A recent survey in MSME by the All India Manufacturers Organization (AIMO, June 2020) shows that 35 per cent MSMEs and 43 per cent of the self-employed said they do not see chances of recovery in their business. As a consequence, hundreds of thousands of people who work for these small businesses may end up with job and salary losses.

Major companies in India such as Larsen and Toubro, Bharat Forge, Ultra Tech Cement, Grasim Industries, Aditya Birla Group, BHEL and Tata Motors have temporarily suspended or significantly reduced operations. Young start ups have been impacted as funding has fallen (*Outlook India*, 1 April 2020 and *Incuz Media*, 1 April 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the existing vulnerabilities of India's banking sector, particularly of banks and non-banks finance companies. Since April 2020, not only has credit growth of banks slowed down, but more importantly, their asset quality has also deteriorate/determinate sharply. Consequently, non-performing loans pertaining to retail and MSME segments are on the rise.

Contraction of the Economy

As per official data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the Indian economy contracted by 23.9 per cent in the April-June Quarter of this fiscal year. This is the worst decline ever recorded since India started compiling GDP statistics on a quarterly basis in 1996. In comparative terms, India's GDP contraction was worse than any of the world's biggest economies. With the exception of China, most major economies witnessed GDP contraction in the April-June Quarter of 2020, but India posted the steepest quarterly decline, far worse than the US (9.1 per cent) and Italy (17.7 per cent) two countries severely hit by the corona virus epidemic. It is pertinent to note that GDP calculation in India do not fully capture the economic activity in the informal sector – which account for more than 50 percent of gross value added. As informal sectors of the economy have been worst hit but by the virus, India's GDP contraction during April-June would well be above 35 per cent if informal sectors are taken into account (*The Indian Express*, 6 September 2020).

Data released by the National Statistical Office shows that construction activity was the worst hit in the quarter contracting 50 per cent, followed by trade, hotel and transportation at 47 per cent and manufacturing at 39 per cent. Agriculture was only silver lining, registering a 3.4 per cent growth in the quarter. Tax revenue have contracted by 42 per cent in April-June 2020 (*The Indian Express*, 17 September 2020).

The two biggest engines of growth for the Indian economy namely – private consumption and investment, during the April-June 2020, exhibit decline. Private consumption – accounting for 59 per cent of India's GDP – declined by 27 per cent, while investments by private businesses fell by 47 per cent. India's net exports turned positive due to sharp compression in imports. During the quarter, government spending increased by 15 per cent, but it was not adequate to compensate for the decline suffered by other engines of growth except for agriculture all the major sectors of the economy were badly hit. Significantly, labour-intensive sectors such as construction, real estate, retail trade, transport and manufacturing contracted sharply during this quarter (Singh, 2020: 5-6).

It is worth noting to note that India had also been witnessing a pre-pandemic slowdown. According of World Bank, the current pandemic has magnified pre-existing risks to India's economic outlook (Dev and Sengupta, 2020). India's GDP downward slide

predates pandemic, largely due to the demonetization misadventure, and the botched-up implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) that paralysed the cash-dominated informal sector and small businesses. For eight successive quarters in 2018-19 and 2019-20, GDP growth declined every quarter, from a high of 8.2 per cent to low of 3.1 per cent. This point was raised by the economists and RBI Annual Report, but the government pretended that India was the 'fastest growing' economy in the world (Chidambaram, 2020). According to a survey carried out by National statistical office, India's unemployment rate touched a 45-year high of 6.1 per cent during 2017-18. Moreover, the stress in India's financial companies has been increasing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Coupled with muted policy (Singh, 2020: 6).

In sum, the supply side has been reeling under three pre-existing shocks namely, demonetisation of 2016, Goods and Services Tax (GST) since 2017 and slowdown in credit growth, the pandemic is creating additional distribution due to the mass exodus of the migrant workers from urban areas, non-availability of finance, restrictions on international trade and logistic issues (Dev and Sengupta, 2020: 46).

Limited Policy Space

Given the state of economy and especially the state of financial institutions, the policy levers available to the government to deal with the economic crisis are limited. The government now has very little fiscal room in view of high fiscal deficit, falling tax collection, declining revenues of public sector enterprise and rising health expenses.

In other words, the combination of demand and supply shocks are hitting the Indian economy at a time when the tools to deal with the crisis are mostly ineffective, namely, fiscal, monetary and financial. Over and above this, the external sectors of the economy have been weakening as well. The nominal value of exports of goods and services – another important driver of the growth – witnessed a decline in by 8.49 per cent in QY of 2010-20.

Of late, few indicators of e.g., power consumptions, passenger's vehicle sales and e-way bills and showing signs of revival in India after the government eased lockdown restriction but a sharp 'v' shaped economy is unlikely to occur during this fiscal year. In the current scenario, it is even harder to predict when economic activity could return to the pre-virus levels, largely because of the health crisis and the government's timid fiscal response (Bhusnurmath, 2020).

Pandemic Relief/Economic Stimulus Packages: An Analysis

On May 12, 2020, the Prime Minister announced a long awaited 'mega' stimulus or relief package of Rs 20 lakh crores, which is 10 per cent of the country's GDP. This package included the various liquidity measures announced by the RBI (Rs 8 lakh crore) and earlier fiscal package announced by the Financial Minister (Rs 170,000 crore) on 26 March 2020. During the announcement, Prime Minister pitched for working towards an *Atmanirbhar* Bharat (Self Sufficient) by being 'Vocal for Local' through measures taken under what he called for four Ls namely; Land, Law, Liquidity and Labour (Harikrishan, 2020: 4; Iyer, 2020). The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaharaman for five days (between 13 and 17 May), held press conferences to provide details of the *Atmanirbhar* package, to provide relief to medium, small and micro enterprises in the form of an increase in credit guarantees (*The Indian Express*, 15 May 2020; *The Times of India*, 20 May 2020).

The economic package was criticized on various fronts. Some reports stated that the economic package didn't address short term demand concerns, which may in turn pull down the economy even more with most of the announcements being related to supply (*The Economic Times*, 18 May 2020). Post the economic package Barbara Harris-White criticised the 'shock tactics' of the Modi government during the COVID-19 Pandemic, comparing with the 'shock tactics' that were seen during demonetisation (Harris-White, 2020).

A careful analysis of the so-called mega package reveals a completely different picture than the projected 10 per cent of the GDP Chimera. The actual fiscal impact on the budget is calculated by economist only Rs 1.5 lakh crore i.e. 0.75 per cent of the GDP⁵ (Harikrishanan, 2020: 4).

A comparative overview of the relief packages across the world highlights that countries in Europe and the US are spending significantly more to take care in the wake of COVID-19. Japan's stimulus package is 21.1 per cent of the GDP followed by the US (13 per cent), Sweden (12 percent), Germany (10.7 per cent), France (9.3 per cent), Spain (7.3 per cent) and Italy (5.7 per cent) (*The Indian Express*, 16 May 2020).

In the context of "*Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana*", announced in March 2020, to provide free ration for over 80 crore people, Nobel prize winning economists Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerji observed that 'what the government is offering now is small potatoes – at most a couple of thousands for a population that is used to spending that

much every few days. If the point is to stop them from going out to find work and thereby spreading the disease, the amounts probably need to be much larger' (Duflo and Banerji, 2020). These comments may be true even after the announcement of the comprehensive Atmanirbhar package.

The stimulus packages announced by the government since March are not helping/gearing faster recovery because the direct government spending component is modest (Mukharji, 2020). The bulk relief measures consist of indirect support such a credit guarantees and liquidity infusions have proved to be ineffective in generating higher credit growth. The credit offtake from banks with remain muted in the near future because of subdued credit demand (Singh, 2020: 8).

It is imperative that the Indian policy makers must act fast and develop a coherent economic recovery strategy aimed at stimulating domestic demand by raising wages of those who at the bottom of the economic pyramid besides strengthening health and social protection system to mitigate the social and economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic (Singh, 2020: 16). The involvement of the state and local government may also be crucial in the effective implementation of the further fiscal initiatives (Dev and Sengupta, 2020: 46).

Impact of Pandemic on the Society

Like the first and second world wars the global corona pandemic has revised the social and economic systems. COVID-19 crisis had severe consequences for the social, economic and political orders. The pandemic has pushed the society under the grip of combination of anxiety, mistrust, fear, panic, depression, insecurity and stigma and other moralizing actions and dissolves the bonds that sustain modern civilization. Face masks, sanitizers and social distancing have become integral part of our lives, i.e., new normal.

The pandemic is turning out be unique as 'it is turning the human body into the mere biological body, bereft of socio-political life. In these tumultuous times, humanity and human sensitivity are being compromised under the spell of 'fear', the fear ranges from material to personal domains.... the fear is evident from the spray of chemical by the government official to emerging social tensions in the inter-community relationships' (Jha and Pankaj, 2020: 61).

While COVID-19 pandemic is a great equalizer, and can attack everyone irrespective of class, caste, gender, age, ability, religion

and region. However, migrant labours are perceived as carrier of disease. Migrant body faced new challenge of 'ostracization', social exclusion stigma as new surveillance mechanisms are enforced (Dey, 2020: 103).

Corona virus has created borders in the economy of life, borders in the movement of bodies in social spaces. In this context, question arises how do caste, race, gender and other fault lines operate in government strategies to cope with a virus epidemic? As Ranbir Samaddar asks a pertinent question of the essence of bio-politics is manage population to control the disease, can we think of an alternative form of bio-politics, which does not segregate population along the lines of caste, or race, or occupation, or gender for disease management? 'How can the entire society be defended?' (Samaddar, 2020a: 12).

Besides, what indeed explain the sudden visibility of the migrant workers in the time of public health crisis? It also brings in the ethical and political implications of the pandemic in India, especially for India's migrant workers. It raises questions about the place of labour in the neo liberal economy, labour right regime and the issue of social justice.

Centre and State Collaboration

Numerous centres versus state tussles have taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic, having a socio-economic impact other than the immediate political impact. Some tussles are directly related to the impact of the pandemic such as the exodus of migrants, liquor became the other source of dispute. Some states have had disputes with the centre related to how the lockdown should be implemented (*Deccan Herald*, 29 April, 2020 and *The India Today*, 10 May 2020).

The Modi government, in view of the corona virus pandemic, suspended Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years. This action has been called problematic in many ways, including causing a centralization of power, being anti-federal in nature and having an effect on local level development and MP influence at micro levels of the society to handle distress (Jha and Deshpande, 2020; *The Week*, 25 April 2020). There have been calls for halting the Rs 20,000 crore (US \$ 2.8 billion) redevelopment of the central vista project in Delhi instead (Katyal, 2020).

Regarding the lifting or relaxation of the lockdown there has been a lack of Centre and state collaboration as well as with local authorities. This has been visible in the handling of migrant labour, now that companies are restarting, there is a labour shortage.

Conclusion

The lessons that must be learnt is that India has been unable to cope with pandemic and its management had dire, long-standing and far reaching effects on the already marginalized workers. And now, labour laws are being diluted which will ensure a further worsening of living conditions. The tragedy is that India is today heading towards a societal breakdown.

Today, when the economy's quarterly GDP has recorded perhaps its worst performance in half century or longer and dark clouds of intense health, humanitarian and economic crises are looming over the country. The new challenge seems to be 'live with the virus' when the country confronts the uncertainties from its exit strategy or lack of it.

The pandemic has impinged on the health system, economy and society in India in multiple ways and its legacy will be carried over in the post-COVID era also. The worst of the continuous sufferings of the poor and the recession in the economy can be averted if the state still chooses to make significant universal cash transfers to every household along with the universalising and expanding the Public Distribution System, vastly expands the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Scheme (MGNREGA), and the line of the New Deal in the US in the 1930s, introduce a massive urban public works programme as well as an urban job guarantee scheme.

Notes

1. According to industry estimates, about 80 per cent of India's 470 million workers are employed in the unorganized sector. Pulling rickshaws, selling vegetables, building, malls, or working as domestic help, they toil to keep the wheels of the informal economy turning.
2. The Karnataka government's decision of not allowing the workers to go back home created a controversy that sparked allegations of bonded labours, forced the government to take a U-turn.
3. Businesses have manipulated policy in their favour – before 1991, by restoring to crony capitalism and since then by tilting policy in their favour, curtailment of workers' rights and pressuring the government to weaken support to the marginalized section on the plea that markets should be allowed to function.
4. In the same vein on 9 April 2020 Rajiv Bajaj, the managing director of the Bajaj Auto, wrote in an opinion piece in *The Economic Times* (9 April 2020) that the 'lockdown makes India weak rather than stronger in combating the epidemic', and that the 'arbitrary' lockdown was total unsustainable and 'recalibration' is needed. Further he contends, 'India may have to sell itself out of the corona virus crisis'. Similarly, on May 25, Anand Mahindra remarked, 'India risks economic hara-kiri (suicide) if lockdown extended for much longer (*ToI*, 11 May 2020). 'Lockdown extensions aren't just economically disastrous, as I had

tweeted earlier, but also create another medical crisis' (25 May 2020, *Livemint*). NR Narayana Murthy is reported to have said that if the lockdown continues, India may see more deaths due to hunger than from the pandemic (*The Economic Times*, 30 April, 2020).

5. The government seems to have taken a cue from mega relief packages announced across the world, notably the US, Canada and the UK, and played a calculated number game. Krishnamurthy Subramaniam, the chief economic advisor, had earlier assessed some of these packages and said that the actual fiscal impact of the package announced by the UK (which was projected as 15% of the GDP) was only 3.7% of the GDP. Similarly, the actual fiscal package announced by the US would actually amount to 6% of the GDP, and not 10% as projected, he said.

References

- Kundu, Amitabh (2017). (Author Veena Kukreja recently died of COVID-19. The editor tried but could not do the needful. We must therefore go by the script sent to us. 21.6.2021.)
- Bagchi, Indrani, (2020), 'A New Order: When the World Emerges from the Pandemic, We'll Wake Up to a New Multilateral Order', *The Economic Times*, 1 June 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/a-new-order-when-the-world-emerges-from-the-pandemic-well-wake-up-to-a-new-multilateral-order/articleshow/76237429.cms> Accessed on: 2 August, 2020.
- Bales, Kevlin, (2020), 'COVID-19: Ensure Labour Laws benefit both Workers and Economy', *Financial Express*, August 3. <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/covid-19-ensure-labour-laws-benefit-both-workers-and-economy/2042741/> Accessed on: 20 September 2020.
- Bhatia, Gautam, (2020), 'India's Executive Response to COVID-9', *The Regulatory Review*, 4 May 2020. <https://www.theregreview.org/2020/05/04/bhatia-indias-executive-response-covid-19/> Accessed on: 5 May, 2020.
- Bhusnurmath, Mythili, (2020), 'View: How will the Economy Recovery Shape Up? Likely Scenario', *The Economic Times*, May 4. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/view-how-will-the-economic-recovery-shape-up-likely-scenarios/articleshow/75523369.cms> Accessed on: 10 June, 2020.
- Chaudhary, Monika, P.R. Sodani, and Shankar Das, (2020), 'Effect of COVID-19 on Economy in India: Some Reflections for Policy and Programme', *Journal of Health Management*, Vol.22, No.2, pp.169-180. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0972063420935541> Accessed on: 10 September, 2020.
- Chidambaram, P., (2020), 'The Worst Affected Economy', *The Indian Express*, September 6. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-economy-slowdown-act-of-god-p-chidambaram-6584615/> Accessed on: 10 September, 2020.

- 'Corona Virus Lockdown Makes India Weak Rather than Stronger, Rajiv Bajaj writer in ET', April 8, 2020. Bloomberg Quint, <https://www.bloombergquint.com/business/coronavirus-lockdown-makes-india-weak-rather-than-stronger-rajiv-bajaj-writes-in-et> Accessed on: 9 April 2020.
- CME 2020. Annual Report 10-K-SEC Report, <https://www.annualreports.com> (Accessed on 21.6.2021.)
- COVID-19 and the State of Labour: Current Practices must be Rectified in Order to Prepare for the Economic Aftermath, *EPW*, Engage ISSN(online)-2349-8846. <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/covid-19-andstate-labour-current-practices-must> Accessed on: 10 October 2020.
- Das, Goutam, (2020), '5 Key Takeaways of Covid-19 Aftermath: That Pandemic that's Likely to Reform the System', May 13. https://medium.com/@goutam_das/5-key-takeaways-of-covid-19-aftermath-15efd7f06000 Accessed on: 15 May, 2020.
- Dev, S. Mahendra and Rajeswari Sengupta, (2020), 'COVID-19: Impact on the Indian Economy: An Interim Assessment', *COVID-19: Impact on the Indian Economy*, Mumbai: Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Institute.
- Dey, Ishita, (2020), 'Social Distancing Touch-Me-Not' and the Migrant Workers' in Ranabir Samaddar, 2020a, *Borders of an Epidemic: COVID-19 and Migrant Workers*, pp.98-103. <https://refugeewatchonline.wordpress.com/2020/04/15/social-distancing-touch-me-not-and-the-migrant-worker/> Accessed on: 20 September, 2020.
- D'souza, Kim, (2020), 'India's Kept Improvising During Coronavirus: Age of Pandemic Needs a New Public Health Law', *The Print*, 12 July 2020. <https://theprint.in/opinion/india-kept-improvising-during-coronavirus-age-of-pandemics-needs-a-new-public-health-law/459122/> Accessed on: 14 July 2020.
- Duflo, N., Abhijit Banerjee, (2020), 'A Prescription for Action: Nine Steps After the Next 21 Days', *The Indian Express*, 29 March. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-lockdown-coronavirus-infection-abhijit-banerjee-esther-duflo-6336624/> Accessed on: 5 April, 2020.
- Economic Survey of India 2017-OECD*, <https://www.oecd.org/economy> (Accessed on 21.6.2021.)
- Economic Survey of India 2019-2020 - Capital Market*. <https://www.capitalmarket.com>....> (Accessed on 21.6.2021.)
- Editorial, (2020), 'Impacts of COVID-19 on Labour', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.55, Issue No.30, July 25.
- ENS Economic Bureau, (2020), 'Minus 23.9 per cent: GDP Shrinks: Slowdown Plus COVID Plus Effect of Lockdown', *The Indian Express*, September 1. <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/economy/economy-slowdown-gdp-contraction-minus-23-9-percent-6578116/> Accessed on: 10 September, 2020.

- Harikrishna (2020) Since Veena Kukreja, author of this paper recently died of COVID-19, she is not available to complete this missing full citation. The editor tried to do the needful but regrettably failed. It may be allowed to go in print as it is.
- Harriss-White, Barbara, (2020), 'The Modi Sarkar's Project for India's Informal Economy', *The Wire*, May 20 <https://thewire.in/political-economy/the-modi-sarkars-project-for-indias-informal-economy>. Accessed on: 25 May 2020.
- Hirway, Indira and Neha Shah, (2011), 'Labour and Employment under Globalisation: The Case of Gujarat', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.46, No.22, pp. 57-65.
- IMF, (2020), 'Policy Response to COVID-19', International Monetary Fund', Washington D.C. <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19> Accessed on: 10 October 2020.
- India will be Risking Economic Hara-Kiri, if Lockdown Extended for Much Longer: Anand Mahindra, *The Economic Times*, May11. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-will-be-risking-economic-hara-kiri-if-lockdown-extended-for-much-longer-anand-mahindra/articleshow/75678326.cms> Accessed on: 20 June, 2020.
- Frey, Isabel, (2020), 'Herd Immunity is Epidemiological Neoliberalism', *The Quarantimes: Life and Politics in the Times of Corona-Pandemic*, 19 March, 2020. <https://thequarantimes.wordpress.com/2020/03/19/herd-immunity-is-epidemiological-neoliberalism/> Accessed on: 30 March, 2020.
- Iyer, P. Vaidyanathan (2020), 'Math behind Rs. 20-Lakh crore Economic Package: It is 10% of GDP but About Half is Already Factored in' *The Indian Express*, May 15. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/the-math-its-10-of-gdp-but-less-than-5-cash-outgo-pm-modi-relief-packages-6407302/> Accessed on: 16 May, 2020.
- Jha, Manoj, and Pushpraj Deshpande, (2020), 'Suspending MPLADS Funds for Corona Virus Crisis is Another Stab in Indian Democracy', *The Print*, 24 April. <https://theprint.in/opinion/suspending-mplads-for-coronavirus-stab-at-indian-democracy/407935/> Accessed on: 25 April, 2020.
- Jha, Manish K and Ajeet Kumar Pankaj, (2020), (2020a), *Borders of An Epidemic: COVID-19 and Migrant Workers*, Kolkata: Calcutta Research Group, 2020.
- Kapoor, Radhicka, (2020), 'The Unequal Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis on Labour Market', *The India Forum*, August 7. <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/unequal-effects-covid-19-crisis-labour-market> Accessed on: 10 August, 2020.
- Katyal, Anita, (2020), 'Union Government should Rethink Central Vista Project', *The New Indian Express*, 25 April. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2020/apr/25/union-government-should-rethink-central-vista-project-2134979.html> Accessed on: 25 April 2020.

- Krishnan Raghu, (2020), 'Lengthy Lockdown will Kill More People than COVID: NR Narayana Murthy', *The Economic Times*, May 1. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/lengthy-lockdown-will-kill-more-people-than-covid-murthy/articleshow/75459491.cms>. Accessed on: 5 May 2020.
- Kumar, Arun, (2020), 'The Pandemic in Changing the Face of Indian Labour', *The Wire*, May 9. <https://thewire.in/economy/covid-19-pandemic-indian-labour> Accessed on: 15 May, 2020.
- Kundu, Amitabh and Mohanan, P.C., (2017), 'Internal Migration in India: A very Moving Story', *Economic Times*, April 11. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/etcommentary/internal-migration-in-india-a-very-moving-story/> Accessed on: 15 April, 2020.
- Lal, Neeta, (2020), 'The Pandemic Revealed India's Invisible Workforce', *The Diplomat*, June 5. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/the-pandemic-revealed-indias-invisible-workforce/> Accessed on: 10 June, 2020.
- Livemint* (Opinion) 2020: The gap year of the world economy, India (Accessed 21.6.2021.)
- Mander, Harsh and Amitanshu Verma, (2020), 'The Corona Virus Lockdown has been a War on India's Informal Labour', *The Wire*, Aug 22. <https://thewire.in/labour/coronavirus-lockdown-informal-labour> Accessed on: 25 August, 2020.
- Mattoo Amitabh and Amrita Narlikar, (2020), 'Resuscitating Multilateralism with India's Help', *The Hindu*, 7 May 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/resuscitating-multilateralism-with-indias-help/article31521059.ece> Accessed on: 10 May, 2020.
- Mishra, Asit Ranjan, (2020), 'Govt. Defends More to Combine Fiscal, Monetary Measures in Stimulus Package', *Mint*, May 15. <https://www.livemint.com/> Accessed on: 25 May, 2020.
- Misra, Udit, (2020) 'PM Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan Economic Package: Here is the Fine Print', *The Indian Express*, May 14. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/narendra-modi-coronavirus-economic-package-india-self-reliance-6406939/> Accessed on: 20 May, 2020.
- Mukharji, Arunoday, (2020), 'Corona Virus: India's Bailout May Not be Enough to Save Economy', *BBC News*, April 3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52117704> Accessed on: 10 April, 2020.
- Nair, Remya, (2020), 'Indian Economy Contracts by 23.9% in Covid-hit Q1 of 2020-21, Fiscal Situation Worsens, August 31. <https://theprint.in/economy/indian-economy-contracts-by-23-9-in-covid-hit-q1-of-2020-21-fiscal-situation-worsens/492850/> Accessed on: 5 September, 2020.
- Oretga, Andres, (2020), 'Multilateralism has Lost its Way', *Global Policy, Global Spector*, July, 7. <https://www.printfriendly.com/p/g/eqwP4s> Accessed on: 15 July, 2020.
- Padmanabhan, Anil, (2020) 'New Delhi Revisits the Lives versus Livelihood Debate', *Mint*, April 12. <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/new-delhi-revisits-the-lives-versus-livelihood->

- debate-11586710892651.html Accessed on: 16 April 2020.
- Pandey, Radhika and Amrita Pillai, (2020), 'Covid-19 and MSMEs: The 'identification' problem', *Ideas for India: for More Evidence Based Policy*, April 20. <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/macroeconomics/covid-19-and-the-msme-sector-the-identification-problem.html> Accessed on: 25 April, 2020.
- Parulkar, Ashwin and Mukta Naik, (2020), 'A Crisis of Hunger: A Ground Report on the Repercussion of COVID-19 Related Lockdown on Delhi's Vulnerable Population', *Centre of Policy Research Report*, March 27. <https://www.cprindia.org/research/reports/crisis-hunger-ground-report-repercussions-covid-19-related-lockdown-delhi%E2%80%99s> Accessed on: 30 March, 2020.
- Ray, Debraj and S. Subramanian, (2020), 'India's Lockdown: An Interim Report', *Working Paper Series*, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), N. 27282, May 2020. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27282> Accessed on: 10 June 2020.
- Samaddar, Ranbir (ed.), (2020a), *Borders of An Epidemic: COVID-19 and Migrant Workers*, Kolkata: Calcutta Research Group, 2020.
- Samaddar, Ranbir (ed.), (2020b), *Burdens of An Epidemic: A Policy Perspective on COVID-19 and Migrant Workers*, Calcutta: ACPG Publication.
- Sen, Sunanda, (2020), 'Rethinking Migration and the Informal Indian Economy in the Time of a Pandemic', *The Wire*, June 1. <https://thewire.in/economy/rethinking-migration-and-the-informal-indian-economy-in-the-time-of-a-pandemic> Accessed on: 10 June, 2020.
- Shah, Alpa and Jens Lerche, (2020), 'The Five Truths about the Migrant Workers' Crisis', *Hindustan Times*, July, 13. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/the-five-truths-about-the-migrant-workers-crisis-opinion/story-awTQUm2gnJx72UWbdPa5OM.html> Accessed on: 20 July, 2020.
- Sharma, Aman, (2020) 'Prime Minister Narendra Modi bats for Unlocking Economy, CMs Divided', *The Economic Times*, May 12. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/pm-narendra-modi-bats-for-unlocking-economy-cms-divided/articleshow/75674126.cms> Accessed on: 12 May 2020.
- Sharma, Yogima Seth, (2020), 'Unemployment Rate Falls to pre-Lockdown Level: CMIE', *The Economic Times*, June 24. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/unemployment-rate-falls-to-pre-lockdown-level-cmie/articleshow/76528571.cms> Accessed on: 27 June 2020.
- Shunmugasundaram, Manuraj, (2020), 'India needs to enact a COVID-19 Law', *The Hindu*, May 8. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/india-needs-to-enact-a-covid-19-law/article31529036.ece> Accessed on: 12 May, 2020.
- Singh, Kavaljit, (2020), 'COVID-19 has Pushed the Indian Economy into Tailspin but There's a Way Out', *The Wire*, Sep 21. <https://thewire.in/economy/covid-19-india-economic-recovery> Accessed on: 25 September 2020.

- Singh, Prachi, Shamika Ravi, and Sikim Chakraborty, (2020), 'COVID-19: Is India's Health Infrastructure Equipped to Handle Epidemic', *Brookings*, March 24. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/03/24/is-indias-health-infrastructure-equipped-to-handle-an-epidemic/> Accessed on: 5 April, 2020.
- Singh, S. K., Patel, Vibhuti, Aditi Chaudhary and Nandlal Mishra, (2020), 'Reverse Migration of Labourers Amidst COVID-19', *Economic and Politically Weekly*, Vol.55, Issue No.32-33, Aug 8.
- 'Some Signs of a Fast Recovery', *The Economic Times*, 23 June 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/et-editorials/some-signs-of-a-fast-recovery/> Accessed on: 30 June 2020.
- Sood, Atul and Paaritosh Nath, (2020), 'Innocuous Mistakes or Sleight of Hand?': Labour Law Changes, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 55, Issue No. 22, May 30.
- 'The Economic Stimulus: More for Supply Less for Demand', *The Economic Times*, May 18, 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/the-economic-stimulus-more-for-supply-less-for-demand/articleshow/75802168.cms> Accessed on: 25 May, 2020.
- The Wire Staff, (2020), 'How the Lockdown Drove a Workforce on the Margins to Further Alienation', *The Wire*, March 29. <https://thewire.in/labour/lockdown-charter-of-demands-internal-migrant-workers> Accessed on: 5 April, 2020.
- Yadav, Yogendra, (2020), 'No matter how you look at it, India's lockdown-2 can cost as many lives as it will save,' *The Print*, 15 May, 2020, <https://theprint.in/opinion/indias-lockdown-2-can-cost-as-many-lives-as-it-saves/402269/> Accessed on: 16 May 2020.