

# ***Asian Studies***

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**Vols. XXXVIII**

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In view of the current disruption caused by the pandemic *Asian Studies* (Vols. XXXVIII, Nos. 1 & 2) is now being published in online mode. We may consider to have a print version of the volume at a later date.

Suranjan Das  
Hony. Director  
NIAS.

# Gandhian Philosophy and the Asia-Pacific Dimension<sup>1</sup>

SARVANI GOOPTU\*

While evaluating the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary year, one was struck time and again, by the phrase ‘relevance of his ideas and philosophies today’ and the yet how it meant something different to everyone, not only in India but everywhere in the world. What is beyond doubt that he is the one Indian who is known to all, even those who do not actually know his name or that of India. Gandhi’s philosophy has endured despite changes in people’s resistance around Asia and so has his larger than his life image. C.F. Andrews in his edited volume of Mahatma Gandhi at work says that, ‘the vital principle of moral resistance, or soul force, taking the place of armed revolt, represents in my opinion by far the greatest contribution, which Mahatma Gandhi has made to the moral philosophy of our own time.’<sup>2</sup> Andrews would have been happy to know that what he prophesied in 1931 is still valid today. In all discussions and debates on the relevance of M. K. Gandhi in political movements today in his this moral force and fostering of brotherhood without discriminations that is still brought up as relevance. There is an opinion among many that Gandhi was not really interested in anything other than what was happening in India and if there were references to the Indian diaspora in Asia, Europe and America in his writings and speeches it was only incidental. I find it strange to believe that someone who developed his philosophy outside India among the Indian diaspora could become victim of a complete amnesia in the space of the few years. It is true that his travelling was limited but one has to take into account his advancing age and the political trauma that he was subjected to as the leading enemy of the imperial government. I have excluded S. Africa from my discussion here and have concentrated on Fiji and Burma.

## Fiji

Back in India from South Africa from 1915, despite his preoccupation with the satyagraha movements and preparing for the Khilafat Non-cooperation, Mahatma Gandhi’s heart still bled for the Indian diaspora in Fiji. After a meeting held at Excelsior Theatre in Bombay to pass resolutions regarding East Africa and Fiji, he raises the issue in Young India where he writes ‘...why there was a martial law, why there was shooting, why Mr. and Mrs. Manilal Doctor (were) deported without trial and without even being heard in their defence. The Government have kept us too long waiting. We insist on full justice being done and we must bring back as speedily as possible all those who wish to return to the motherland.’<sup>3</sup> The first criticism about the indenture system of bringing in Indian labour for agriculture in Fiji in 1864 was by Sir Arthur Gordon, a missionary. But it was to no avail as the plantation owners realised that this was financially

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<sup>1</sup> A part of this paper was presented at an International conference on Mahatma Gandhi and the quest for a Just and Democratic Order at Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner (29-30 Jan 2020)

<sup>2</sup> C.F Andrews ed., *Mahatma Gandhi At Work: His own story continued*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 21: 1 July, 1920- 21 Nov. 1920, Young India, 21-7-1920, p. 77.

the best arrangement for them so that in 1878, arrangements were made with the Government of India for an indenture contract under which labourers were to be brought in by the government of Fiji for five years of compulsory labour under government direction. After this they would be free to return to India at their own expense though at the end of another five years, their passages and those of their children were to be paid by the Fiji government. Most importantly however there was no compulsion on them to return at all. On 14 May 1879, 498 indentured Indians arrived at Fiji on the *Leonidas* from Calcutta. But very soon the *girmityas* system became riddled with corruption and forced migration. There was a lot of angst among those who travelled to Fiji since travelling by sea led to enforced intermingling with other castes and loss of caste positions which forbore societal difficulties for their families and for their future return. Despite the proposed financial compensation the leap of faith into the unknown since they had no clue about where they were going and what work they would have to undertake. Even more forced was the women's migration which was demanded by the Fijis so that their society remained untouched and the Indian migrants had their family life. But married women did not want to travel. Also the work at the sugar plantations was seasonal which made for uncertainty regarding their future and housing was in barracks with no privacy for family life. Abuses multiplied due to the task system and for women who were always in a disadvantage of numbers abuse was rampant due to the degrading allotment system. J.W Burton a missionary was the first to expose the abuses and Gokhale a newly appointed member of the Imperial Legislative council attacked it in 1912 resulting in government deputation in 1914 to study the system. The report concentrated on the economic rather than social aspects nonetheless sent shockwaves among the intelligentsia in India. CF Andrews and WW Pearson sent to Fiji and their report was filed in 1916. As Adrian Mayers writes, there were different reasons for the condemnation in the report. 'the physical reasons for its condemnation included the cramped conditions in the lines, the high death rate and the lack of medical care and the excessive work extorted from the labourers. Social reasons centred on the disproportionate sex ratio and the breakdown of traditional rules of conduct which with an excessively high conviction rate for minor misdemeanours were reflected in an extraordinarily high suicide rate.'<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that the Fiji situation was actively protested against by Gokhale, Gandhi's mentor it was MK Gandhi who had been asked by a group composed of both young educated Fiji born people and high caste men from India including Totaram Sanadhya, Babu Ram Singh, Ram Rup and J.P. Maharaj who met in Suva to send an English educated lawyer to Fiji 'to serve the Indians and prevent them from being exploited by European lawyers who were benefitting from the copious Indian litigations. Totaram's account in Hindi, *My 21 years in Fiji* and Burden's *Fiji Today*, described in detail the hardships of the Fiji Indians and made Indians back home aware of the problems of their brethren in Fiji. It was Totaram who wrote the letter to Gandhi who in reply promised to send an English educated patriot to Fiji when he found one suitable and asked to be kept in touch with conditions there. This correspondence published in *Indian opinion* was read by a Manilal Maganlal Doctor, a Gujrati Lawyer in Mauritius who had fought for Indians' rights there since 1907. When he agreed to go, money was raised in Fiji for his fare and he arrived in Sept 1912. Hundreds met him at the wharf and followed his carriage through the street of Suva. Manilal was the only Indian leader in the indenture period who commanded a Fiji-wide following. He had studied law in England and had a fluent command of

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian C Mayers, *Indians in Fiji*, London: OUP, 1963, pp. 13-21

English. In his political views he was left wing and an Indian nationalist. As Mayer points out, 'he had that combination of manner, idealistic outlook and political sophistication in so often in evidence in the nationalist movement in India', which was obviously the reason why he became so successful there in providing leadership and help to the aggrieved Indians. Mahatma Gandhi through correspondence with Manilal advocated a nonviolent struggle to end the system. This strengthened the resolve of the Fiji Indians who held demonstrations burning the effigies of the Indian coolie. Indian women marched to the Viceroy's palace in New Delhi and Mahatma Gandhi and Rev. Andrews addressed meetings all over India...The British government in London realised the futility of resisting Indian public opinion in the interest of a few European planters in Fiji and capitulated. On March 12 1917, all labour recruiting centres were ordered closed in India supposedly for the duration of the war with the result, from Jan 1, 1920 the indentured system died its natural death. However this did not end the troubles of the Fiji Indians because 15 days later a strike by labourers in the Public works dept and Municipal corporation in Suva, Nausori and Levuka due to dissatisfaction at the rise in the cost of living during and after the War, and the futile hope for an immediate large increase in wages due to the abolition of indenture led to a grave situation. The strike was led by Manilal and his wife. During the following days, meetings were called to state the workers' demands and there were minor disorders, which the authorities thought could easily develop into something more serious. On 30<sup>th</sup> Jan a deputation led by Manilal's wife presented its grievances to the Governor asking for a daily wage of five shillings and a Commission for enquiry into the high prices. The Gov agreed to the Commission and there was a short period of calm. But patience was tried as each day brought news of the intimidation of the non-strikers with special constables were recruited from among the Europeans and Fijian police were despatched from other parts of the colony. There were baton charges, with injuries on both sides leading to arrests of many strikers. Telephone wires between Suva and Nausori were cut, bridges destroyed and on 12<sup>th</sup> Feb police with fixed bayonets dispersed a stone throwing crowd at Nausori. On the next day a man was shot dead in a similar fracas. All meetings were then proscribed and movements in the affected areas were restricted. On the 14<sup>th</sup> a warship from New Zealand arrived and stood off the coast and in two days the strike ended as suddenly as it had begun. The tragedy for the Indian protestors was that unlike Manilal who was fighting tooth and nail for the Indian Fijis and opposed through the Indian Imperial Association of Fiji, the proposal of some Europeans that Fiji be annexed by New Zealand, there was opposition to his movement and action by others like Badri Maharaj who spear headed the petition to the Fiji government to punish him.<sup>5</sup> In Fiji deportation became an accepted punishment as Sadhu Bashist Muni was also deported the next year. As Pran Nath Seth wrote in his book, *Fiji: A Paradise in Peril*, the credit for shaking the conscience of the whole world in favour of Fiji Indians would go to the lawyer Manilal, who played a crucial role in the Indian struggle against discriminatory policies of the Fiji Government in the years to come.<sup>6</sup> The Commission in 1920 that was sent to Fiji to look into the Indo Fijian political and educational demands and condition of labour there, was not approved by Gandhi who in an interview on Indians Abroad said that that it would be useless for a Commission to look into labour conditions if they were not 'armed with the power to investigate the causes of the unrest.'<sup>7</sup> On the issue of deportation of Manilal Doctor and his wife Gandhi claimed that he should be compensated since

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid pp. 35-37

<sup>6</sup> Pran Nath Seth, *Fiji: A Paradise in Peril*, Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1991, pp. 28-29

<sup>7</sup> MK Gandhi, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi,



he had made Fiji his home and had even bought property. The rights of Indian settlers there should be a priority of the government of India he warned so that 'spirit of lawlessness among the powerful' does not surface.<sup>8</sup> The Commission set up in 1920 in its report showed that the Indo Fijians wanted that suffrage based on qualifications of education, property and income should be introduced, they wanted to vote for Indo Fijians rather than representatives of other communities and finally they advocated the indirect election of representative by electoral boards consisting of members sent by local councils (panchayats). According to some experts like KL Gillion, 'If these recommendations had been accepted then there would have been long lasting impact for the political action and leadership for the Indo Fijians in comparisons to other communities.'<sup>9</sup>

## Burma

Gandhi's first visit to Burma was around 1901 during the Calcutta Congress. B. R. Nanda writes that Gandhi 'paid a flying visit to Rangoon where he saw the golden pagoda, the foongis, 'the freedom and energy of the Burmese women, 'and the 'indolence of the men',<sup>10</sup> a description which resonates with all the writing on Burma at that time. It was some years later in 1908, that Indian National Congress set up a branch in Burma (by one P.J. Mehta), and it was much later that it became active and popular among the immigrant Indians. The second visit of Gandhi has been just mentioned in passing by Nanda without providing details. Gandhi wrote about his journey in a letter to Hermann Kallenbach, that 'this time I had a real experience of deck passage... it was a time of trial. You would have almost died in the latrine...I am sending a complaint to the company.'<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime nationalism in Burma developed with an eye on the political movement against colonialism in India. While conflicts emerged in the 1920s and 30s between the economic interests of the indigenous Burmese and the domiciled Indians, the struggle for independence from British rule became an area of parallel interest between India and Burma. During the Gandhian movements in India in the 20s and 30s the Indian National Congress became the role model for Burmese nationalism as well and boycott and non-cooperation movements had their parallels in Burma. In 1920 when the INC organised a nationwide boycott against the visit of Prince of Wales, a similar protest was organised by Burmese leaders in Burma.<sup>12</sup> The autobiography of a President by U Ba U shows his early interest in making friends with Indians students in Cambridge though he was warned against it by Burmese officials because they were alleged to have been paid by the India Office to spy on their fellows.<sup>13</sup> Walter Sadgung Desai, a professor of History university of Rangoon, who wrote *India and Burma*<sup>14</sup> with the professed aim of improving relations between the two countries, shows that in the development of Nationalism there is no doubt that the Burmese followed the Indian lead. 'Indian

<sup>8</sup> M. K. Gandhi, Young India, 21-4-1920, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi,

<sup>9</sup> K. L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: A history to the end of Indenture in 1920*, Melbourne: OUP, 1962

<sup>10</sup> B. R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol 14, Dec 26 1913- May 20, 1915, p. 386

<sup>12</sup> Khin Maung Ki, Indians in Burma: Problems of an Alien subculture in a highly integrated society, in KS Sandhu and A Mani eds., *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Times Academic Press and Institute of South east Asia, 1993, p. 638-640

<sup>13</sup> U Ba U, *Autobiography of a President*, p. 38

<sup>14</sup> W. S. Desai, *India and Burma*, Calcutta: Orient Longmans Ltd., (The Indian Council of World Affairs), 1954.

leaders periodically visited Burma, Indian newspapers and other publications found circulation in Burma and when the Indian National Congress challenged the British control over the subcontinent of India, intelligent Burmans keenly and sympathetically followed the developments...Still Burmese nationalism was distinct from Indian nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

Despite serious misgivings about his impending trip to Burma on 5<sup>th</sup> March, Gandhi in 1929, writes that he was looking forward to renewing his friendship with P. J. Mehta and his other Burmese friends who had invited him to speak at different forums.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting how many diverse groups he addresses giving a whole array of advice yet staying true to his idea of Truth. Gandhi's meticulous nature is revealed when he asks the Burma Congress Committee to have all documents ready, names of original members, and donation amounts, digest of work done by the Committee, register of volunteers and office staff, and a note on the working of khadi rule in the congress constitution, so that he could audit the finances.<sup>17</sup> Addressing a public gathering on March 8<sup>th</sup>, Gandhi reiterated his admiration for the 'freest women in the world' and 'the openness in men and women in Burma', he praised the progress of the metropolis of Rangoon, in the magnificence of the roads which was a reflection of the progress of the countryside. While addressing Municipal workers he asked that they refrain from approaching their profession with interested and selfish motives. 'they must approach their sacred task in a spirit of service. They should pride themselves upon calling themselves scavengers...the spirit of scavenging (is)... not merely by way of looking after physical sanitation of a city but also of the internal sanitation of its citizens.'<sup>18</sup> This trip was important for Gandhi since he was collecting donations for Khadi fund and the millions of starving poor in India. Addressing the Gujarati Association he pointed out that just as they had donated for Khadi they should also strive for a true Dharma which will make them foster Hindu Muslim unity and provide donations for Jamia Millia.<sup>19</sup> That Gandhi was aware of the animosity of local populations in different countries where there was Indian diaspora is evident in his speech at a meeting in Rangoon on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1929. He says, that 'there has been a complaint against you to which I want to draw your attention. It is that Indians do not share the Burman's lot, but they cause them harm. I hope that there is exaggeration in this complaint but I am afraid that there is some grain of truth in it. For I noted such a habit in the Indians in Ceylon and also those in South Africa...I appeal to you not to forget your brethren of Burma.'<sup>20</sup> The reason for the affinity between Hindu Indians and the Burmese according to him was the common factor of Buddhism which he claimed was an offshoot of Hinduism. In a meeting on the same day he appealed to both Indian and Burmese students not to forget to serve humanity or *Daridranarayan* which he points out was a name coined by Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, and exhorts them to 'purify their hearts' if they wanted to become guardians of the purity of every girl and woman in Burma as 'real patriots and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 21-2-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11May 1929, p. 95

<sup>17</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 28-2-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11May 1929, p. 130

<sup>18</sup> MkGandhi, The Hindustan Times, 11-3-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11May 1929, p. 196

<sup>19</sup> MkGandhi, Navjivan, 24-3-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11May 1929, p. 206

<sup>20</sup> MkGandhi, Mahadev Desai's Diary, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11May 1929, pp. 207-209

protectors of the weak'.<sup>21</sup> Gandhi also addressed Phoongys at the Shwe Dagon pagoda on 10<sup>th</sup> March where he said that if they intended to lead the political movement in Burma, they had a very 'serious responsibility upon their shoulders. I would ask you not only to be pure beyond suspicion, but I would ask you to combine with stainless purity great wisdom and great ability. This very essential condition being granted, you will find that the whole of Burma will be at your beck and call and will respond to your lead.'<sup>22</sup> That evening Gandhi received an invitation by the labourers so prepared for addressing a labour demonstration, the Mahatma was amazed to find himself witnessing a theatrical performance by them. Seriously taken aback Gandhi in his speech reminded the labourers of the 'insidious effects of the theatre' and warned them 'to have a regard for your little children whose innocence you expose to an unconscionable strain by taking them to questionable performance' and urged that 'they preserve their purity.'<sup>23</sup> He made speeches at other places in Burma too. At Moulmein he addressed Burmese women and drew their attention to two things: their taste in foreign fineries and smoking habit and said, that 'you are enjoying a freedom no other women on earth are enjoying at the present moment. You are noted for your industry and your skill. You have great organising capacity and if you will but revise your taste for foreign fineries and take to heart the message of simplicity that I have given you, you will revolutionise your life...' <sup>24</sup> A similar message was also given at a long speech to Burmese women in Rangoon to on 18<sup>th</sup> April. In a speech in Paungde he said that Indians should learn Burmese and interest themselves in Burmese welfare and associate themselves with them in all beneficial activities. He urged Indians to be friends of the Burmese and lead life so that the Burmese may think well of them. <sup>25</sup> In Mandalay Gandhi expressed anguish at all the Indian leaders who had been 'buried alive' at the jail naming Lokmanya Tilak, the Lion of Punjab and in recent times Sjt Bose and numerous other sons of Bengal. 'Mandalay is thus a pilgrimage for us Indians.'<sup>26</sup> In the last place he visited in Burma, Toungoo, Gandhi contemplated Buddha's message and said that if penance was necessary for Gautama himself who was infinitely greater than all of us put together, how much more necessary is it for us, no matter if we are dressed in yellow or not.'<sup>27</sup>

Ma Mya Sein, who was principal of the Buddhist girls school in Rangoon, Chairman of Rangoon Education Board and Director of women's civil defence as well as being the only woman delegate to the Burma Round Table conference, wrote that despite centuries of connections between India and Burma, the colonial policy which led to a large immigration of Indians into Burma brought the people of the two communities into a state of confrontation. As

<sup>21</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 4-4-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, pp. 207-209

<sup>22</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 23-3-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, pp. 212-213

<sup>23</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 23-3-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, pp. 216-217

<sup>24</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 11-4-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, pp. 228-229

<sup>25</sup> Hindustan Times, 18-3-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, pp. 242-243

<sup>26</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 18-4-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, p. 251

<sup>27</sup> MkGandhi, Young India, 18-4-1929, The Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, vol 45, 4 Feb 1929-11 May 1929, p. 253

she writes, 'This competition between two peoples may not be as extensive or acute as some nationalists think, but in times of acute economic distress, as in 1930, the Burmese found the Indians a convenient object of resentment, and Indo-Burmese relations deteriorated rapidly.'<sup>28</sup> The decade prior to the separation of Burma from India was marked by political and economic unrest. The collapse of rice prices during the period of depression caused a rapid growth in the indebtedness of the rural population and the large scale alienation of land resulted in serious agrarian problems. The first Indo-Burman riots took place in 1930. There was dissatisfaction over the Simon Commission Report in June and December, and a rebellion broke out in the Therrawaddy district. The cause was most probably economic but though limited in area the rebellion exhibited many of the characteristics of one of those periodic nationalist risings that used to take place after the annexation. None of the main political parties joined the movement. And it soon developed into a looting campaign directed mainly against the Indians though Chinese were targeted as well.<sup>29</sup> Desai shows that it was the poor Indian dock labourers, shop assistants, rickshaw pullers and conservancy workers who became targets of attack in 1930 and more than 120 were killed and many more wounded. For four days the authorities merely looked the other way. Matters became so serious that troops had to be called. But the perpetrators were not arrested and no trials were held. Even the police officers who had openly sided with the rioters were not brought to book. A number of India constables resigned in protest. When an Indian police officer was courageous enough to give the correct statement of facts before an enquiry committee was labelled hostile and became a marked man. The life of the poor Indian labourer was counted cheap by the bureaucracy. Soon after Burmese convicts in the Rangoon central jail rose against their officers and murderous attacks upon them. Now the jailers and warders were largely Indians. The Indian military police had to be called in and several convicts were shot down before the situation could be brought under control. 1938 anti-muslim riot took place in Rangoon and certain other towns. The Burmese mind had been for some time agitated at the growing population of Zerabadis in the country. Again, there were Indian mahomedans who while having their own wives in India were in the habit of cohabiting with Burmese women in Burma. Marriage to the Burmese Buddhist is not a sacrament, it is just a civil contract. According to the Burmese Buddhist law and practice a man and woman publicly living together, without having gone through a marriage ceremony are recognized as husband and wife. The Mahomedan however did not look upon his Burmese wife as a legal wife, by Muslim law property could not descend to her or to her children...went to his Indian wife. I could not find the Mahatma's reactions to these anti-Indian riots and attacks and will have to look in more detail.

### **Varied interpretations of Gandhian ideas:**

A book by a Chinese intellectual Carsun Chang who hosted Rabindranath Tagore during his visit there and was forced to flee in 1949 from China and take shelter in Nehruvian India has dedicated a section of his book to comparing Gandhi with Confucius saying that Gandhian philosophy can be explained by the eight stages, namely world peace, government of the state, order in the family, self-discipline, sanctification of the heart, truthfulness of the will, improvement of the intellect, investigation of things. 'In reverse order of these stages, the same book says as follows: "things being investigated, intellect became complete. The intellect being complete, their will became truthful. Their will being truthful, their hearts or minds were

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<sup>28</sup>Ma Mya Sein, *Burma*, London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1943, pp. 23-25.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 28

sanctified. Their hearts being sanctified, their persons were well disciplined. Their persons being disciplined, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were well governed. Their states being well governed, the whole world was made tranquil and happy.” The key to the eight stages is self-development... If this order of internal purification and external service is the right way of life, then we know why the achievement of Gandhi is so much appreciated by the Chinese. His whole life agrees with what the Great Learning instructs.’<sup>30</sup> The reason for Chang’s assertion of this was because in his words, ‘the idea that a leader can only lead the people by his example, was known to Gandhi before he returned to lead the Independence Movement in India....In order to serve one’s country, one should lead a life of sacrifice and suffering which will be an example followed by millions of people. Again, one’s motive for starting a campaign for fighting for the independence of one’s country must be pure...he (Gandhi) sought to win Indian independence for the good of his people and not for his own name. Chang also quotes Gandhi on how he worked on the question of self-discipline. ‘But the road to self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion free in thought, speech, and action: to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion.” Chang says that, ‘Every word that Gandhi has written here is endorsed by the Chinese scholars both of the Confucian and the Taoist schools.’<sup>31</sup> He identifies similarities between the thoughts of Gandhi and many Chinese scholars in his study of different aspects of Gandhi’s life and ideas- his deep religiosity, his sense of love and responsibility, his spirit of courage and the question of right and wrong and finally his leadership qualities for leading a national independence movement.<sup>32</sup>

I had started the paper by saying that in many cases Gandhian philosophy endured through his influence on others though of course that often involves a very subjective interpretation and often free distortions. U Nu, who became Myanmar’s first prime minister, paid a visit to Gandhi in New Delhi in 1947 before his assassination the following year. Gandhi Hall and Gandhi Hospital became significant places in Myanmar’s political and healthcare systems and yet Aung San Suu Chi who fought for democracy in Burma greatly influenced by Gandhianism later moved ahead in politics in her own way. B. R. Nanda in an edited volume *In Search of Gandhi*, writes that, ‘leaders of Asian and African nationalism like Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nelson Mandela of Africa...(understood Gandhi).’<sup>33</sup> David Hardiman has shown that ‘The Fifth Pan African Congress which met in Manchester in 1945 endorsed Gandhian passive resistance as the preferred method for resistance to colonialism in Africa. Kwame Nkrumah launched his campaign of Positive Action in Gold Coast in 1950. In a pamphlet entitled what I mean by Positive Action, he called for intensified nonviolent struggle, which would include strikes, boycotts and non-cooperation. He referred to Gandhi’s movement in India as an example of the successful use of these methods...He became labelled...as Gandhi of Africa.’<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Kaunda, the Zambian nationalist was committed to Gandhian nonviolence and founded the United National Independence Party in 1960 which managed to win power in

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<sup>30</sup> Carsun Chang, p.275

<sup>31</sup> P. 279

<sup>32</sup> Pp. 284-294

<sup>33</sup> B.R.Nanda, *In Search of Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 61

<sup>34</sup> David Hardiman, Gandhi’s Global legacy in Judith M.Brown and Anthony Parel eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 244-5

1964 through a disciplined nonviolent movement, though he deviated from Gandhian ideas when he claimed that 'violence and nonviolence, far from being absolute alternatives are complimentary in practice. As a tactic the effectiveness of nonviolence is enhanced when it stands out in sharp relief against a backdrop of imminent or actual violence' and actually backed away from nonviolence when he came to power. In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere emphasised that they had deployed nonviolent resistance during the independence movement as it provided by far the most efficacious method in the circumstances. He stated however that he was no Gandhian as he had applied nonviolence only tactically and did not believe in it as a principle. Even in South Africa, Manilal Gandhi's protest campaign in 1946 against new discriminatory legislation against Indian origin Africans was admired by Nelson Mandela. In 1949, the African National Congress committed itself to nonviolence in its struggle against apartheid but most of the leaders saw it as a tactical rather than a moral principle to be followed at all costs. A number of environmental activists and leaders also draw inspiration from Gandhi like Petra Kelly as do anti-nuclear armaments campaigners. In 1932, Rabindranath Tagore had written in Asia's response to the Call of the New Age in *The Modern Review* that, 'Life in Asia has become restless and self-assertive. The reason is, in spite of the unremitting pressure of Europe she has completely lost her true hold upon Asia's mind....Signs of an awakening in Asia have slowly spread from one end of the horizon to the other. The glow of a new dawn above the eastern mountain ranges of humanity is indeed a great vision- it is the vision of freedom. Freedom, not only from external bondages, but from those of slumberous inaction and disbelief in one's inner power.'<sup>35</sup> In 1947, during the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi, Gandhi appealed to the delegates from different parts of Asia that 'all the assembled wise men should put their heads together and understand the message of Asia.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, Asia's response to the call of the new age, *The Modern Review*, LII (4)(310), 1932, pp. 370-371

<sup>36</sup> MKGandhi, *Asian Relations: Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference New Delhi, March-April 1947*, Delhi: Asian Relations Organisation, 1948.

# Recalibrations, Negotiations and Wayfinding: Newer assemblages of the Pandemic and the dystopia in India

Dr Anup Shekhar Chakraborty<sup>1</sup>

## Moving from the Rhythm to Dystopia

Towards the closing months of the year 2019 when the world embattled the deadly novel coronavirus or the COVID-19, India was engaged in altering its Federal rhythm, oblivious of the threats of the seemingly small virus. At the political front the monolith of exceptional leadership within the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) came to be questioned with conflicting commands from the PMO (Prime Minister's Office), and the Home Ministry on issues such as the NRC<sup>2</sup> and Modi's weakening position in front of the surge of Amit Shah amidst the Delhi riot<sup>3</sup> during Trump's 24-25 February 2020 visit.<sup>4</sup> The tensions in the altering federal rhythm were furthered by the failure of the opposition parties and the left intelligentsia to cope with the issue of CAA and NRC. Significant problems in the altering federal rhythm included the abolition of Article 370<sup>5</sup>, and the triple talaq<sup>6</sup>. Several experts linked the disgruntledness to religious bigotry, political agenda of Hindutva, and the Centre's excesses. Thus, the federal rhythm off-tuned few states gave kneejerk reactions in a manner that those are no more part of India. The central leadership of the BJP kept itself busy in the game of political brinkmanship until mid-March 2020 in an attempt to install its government in Madhya Pradesh. The 'Corona' till then had not taken over the conversations within the federal order, and the Health Ministry on 13 March 2020 had declared that COVID-19 was 'not a health emergency.'<sup>7</sup>

The pre-COVID-19 India navigated with the politics of accusations and counter-accusations of 'being anti-national,'<sup>8</sup> 'saving Democracy,'<sup>9</sup> weeding the 'Modi wave,' scripting a counter-narrative to Modi<sup>10</sup> and manufacturing a consensus among the fractured and disparate

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<sup>2</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/nrc-aane-wala-hai-amit-shah-makes-his-intention-clear/videoshow/72454609.cms> retrieved 12 March 2020

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/25/delhi-rocked-by-deadly-protests-during-donald-trumps-india-visit> retrieved 12 March 2020

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/watch-donald-trump-visit-to-india/article30887793.ece> retrieved 12 March 2020

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/amit-shah-kashmir-article-370-move-tribute-to-indian-soldiers-1604671-2019-09-30> retrieved 12 March 2020

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/politics-of-appeasement-was-reason-for-continuance-of-evil-practice-of-triple-talaq-says-amit-shah-2274793.html> retrieved 19 December 2019

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/coronavirus-outbreak-union-health-ministry-press-conference-in-new-delhi/article31061163.ece> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>8</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/anti-national-sloganeers-at-jnu-deserve-jail-amit-shah-slams-rahul-kejriwal/articleshow/73217651.cms?from=mdr> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/west-bengal-cm-mamata-banerjee-remembers-martyrs-urges-people-to-save-democracy/article28626203.ece> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>10</sup> <https://theprint.in/opinion/modis-fear-of-narrative-is-our-insurance-against-his-excesses/269413/> retrieved 20 May 2020

opposition through a ‘Mahagathbandhan.’<sup>11</sup> Bharat (the often-used word for rural India) was in parts in slumber and parts partially awoken to issues of the agrarian economy, market, and indebtedness. Sweeping across traditional barriers, political leanings, institutional affiliations, and geographies, India exhibited signs of dystopia.<sup>12</sup>

### **Pradharo Maro Desh (Welcome to my country): The Mobile Virus and its Reception**

The first officially reported and digitized COVID 19 case came from the southern Indian state of Kerala on 30 January 2020. It was also the first Indian state to take the Coronavirus spread as a severe health issue and opt to develop a plan of action to combat the threat effectively. The coming of the Pandemic to India did not have its ripples of caution across the country. Mostly, due to the states’ conviction that ‘everything is in order,’ or something would be ‘*jugaad*’<sup>13</sup> to mitigate the alien ‘Chinese’ virus.<sup>14</sup> Social media across India was flooded with viral videos and narrations: the Lockdown in Wuhan<sup>15</sup>; the technology-assisted life support<sup>16</sup> that China was engineering to negotiate the virus; the Wuhan wet market<sup>17</sup> that was believed to be the source of the killer virus and the alleged Chinese laboratories<sup>18</sup> where this bio-warfare was created, in circulation, these videos did little to inject a sense of caution and preparedness to combat the globetrotting virus’s arrival in India. The unseriousness of the media (both real and virtual) further cemented the complacent character of its multitudes. The unseriousness of the television media could be gleaned through the period’s reportages, primarily through episodes of news channels inviting Bollywood playback singers to sing ‘Corona na Pyaar hai’<sup>19</sup> or ‘Corona na Corona’<sup>20</sup>. The English print media in India through December to March placed the Pandemic in less critical pages. They preoccupied the readers with reports on the more saleable news of Anti-CAA, gully gully Shaheen Bagh, JNU and Jamia<sup>21</sup> students protests, and the walking through the Pandemic<sup>22</sup> act of prominent opposition at the states.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/elections/mahagathbandhan-drowns-in-modi-tsunami/article27226879.ece> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/05/a-golden-age-for-dystopian-fiction> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/jugaad-innovation/> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/newsfeed/2020/03/trump-defends-calling-coronavirus-chinese-virus-200323102618665.html> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/features/diary-of-a-wuhan-lockdown-survivor-11591368167250.html> retrieved 20 June 2020

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8S\\_ZBlk5tQg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8S_ZBlk5tQg) retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2020/04/coronavirus-linked-to-chinese-wet-markets/> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZC0gww2yznI> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.indiatvnews.com/video/entertainment/exclusive-singer-alka-yagnik-gives-a-musical-message-to-fans-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-602825> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>20</sup> <https://news.abplive.com/videos/news/india-abhijeet-bhattacharya-hails-corona-warriors-through-his-songs-1227493> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>21</sup> [https://qz.com/india/1775183/a-history-of-jamia-millia-islamia-which-spurred-cao-nrc-protests/](https://qz.com/india/1775183/a-history-of-jamia-millia-islamia-which-spurred-caa-nrc-protests/) retrieved 20 January 2020

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.indiaaheadnews.com/latest/wb-mamata-takes-out-massive-protest-march-against-cao-345700> retrieved 19 December 2019



The change in the federal rhythm and the Centre's intention loudly proclaimed by the Home Minister Amit Shah to change the citizenship laws was viewed by the opposition and those labelled as 'Left-Liberals' to be 'discriminating against Muslims'.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly the narratives on the Shaheen Bagh in the media gave muffled reports on two aspects of the 'Delhi Danga' (Delhi riots)- one being the role of incitement by alleged local leaders from the BJP<sup>24</sup>, and second, the role and action/inaction of Delhi Government led by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and the local leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). These events served as steles marking the dystopia.

The 'Namaste Trump' fanfare and the convergence of crowds that trailed Trump's visit in February 2020, was not viewed as a 'problem' or a 'possible site for spreading the viruses'. The Government of India was speaking in forked tongue, while the protestors at various sites were labelled possible spreaders, those converging to usher the Political delegates were spared labels. The Trump-Modi bromance formed a part of the silhouette of the Pandemic's visit to India.

### **Combating the travelling virus:**

India's response to combat the Pandemic was marred by the unintelligible conversations resulting in a cacophony. While the Indian government, led by Narendra Modi blindly felt its way to a *jugaad* and opted for the most straightforward yet most controversial response that is a stringent lockdown. The states controlled by non-BJP political parties continued to egg the Centre, and fan the pickled angst that had resulted in nation-wide unrest in the preceding months. Few opposition leaders went on record to assert their opinions and suspicion of the central government's cautions of the pandemics' new travel destination, i.e., India. The Centre's message and warnings (about the virus and possible Pandemic) were rubbished as failure to come to talk with the protestors and the disgruntled across India. With data in hand about the precarity of health services and the dearth of sanitization amidst the fanfare of pet-projects such as the *Swachh Bharat Mission*<sup>25</sup>, the Centre uncomfortably came to terms with the mismatch between rhetoric and reality.

These multiversal issues underscored the visit of the Pandemic in India up till Modi's televised call for a *Janata Curfew*<sup>26</sup> on Sunday, 22 March 2020. On 19 March 2020, Modi in his televised address urged the *Janata* (People) to come out of isolation on that day at 5:00 p.m. to clap their hands or bang thalis (metal plates) to applaud those working in essential services. This was just the first task in Modi's political juggernautism that aimed to build a sense of '*Rashtra sadbhavana evam ekata*' (National Goodwill and Unity) with Modi's charm of offensive as the pivot. This was followed by his announcement on 24 March 2020 of a complete nation-wide lockdown for twenty-one days beginning on 25 March 2020.

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<sup>23</sup> Niraja Gopal Jayal, "Faith-Based Citizenship: The Dangerous Path India is Choosing," India Forum, 1 November 2019, <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/faith-criterion-citizenship> retrieved 19 December 2019

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/delhis-muslims-despair-justice-police-implicated-hindu-riots> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/major\\_initiatives/swachh-bharat-abhiyan/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/major_initiatives/swachh-bharat-abhiyan/) retrieved 12 March 2020

<sup>26</sup> <https://theprint.in/india/modi-announces-Janata-curfew-on-22-march-urges-for-restraint-to-fightcoronavirus/384138/>

With limited effective choices to combat the ‘Virus,’ the Modi government in its trademark authoritative command opted for a nation-wide Lockdown giving a four hours’ notice. The states, in particular, those under the opposition parties began to play a new symphony of not being consulted. The state’s leadership suddenly became vocal about the *Janata*’s right to mobility and played their version of televised ‘authoritative command’ with a punch of compassion towards the *Janata/ aam aadmi* (people/common man). Interestingly none paid attention to the mostly undocumented migrants and the wage earners who formed the backbone of urban Indian cities. The states earned their brownie points by accusing the Centre and Modi of taking a hasty decision and turning a deliberate blind eye to the ‘walking migrants’ while themselves doing nothing to hold the mobile migrants and reassuring them the security of food, water, shelter, health and life. The states needed and welcomed the migrants to build cities, infrastructure and the paraphernalia of logistics to drive neoliberal dreams of a vibrant and smart India. Faced with the Pandemic, the states preferred to push them back to their respective ‘Desh’ (home states, ancestral villages as we call it in South Asia). Few states set up expert committees with international experts sans the presence of virologists and epidemiologists, and like the Centre failed to grasp and grip the pulse of the Pandemic and the pragmatism required.

### **The Virtual -Viral ‘Halla Gulla’ (Cacophony):**

The left-liberal section of the intelligentsia and the opposition parties in India took to seize the virtual public sphere through out-of-turn and out-of-place speaking. They accused the BJP and the Prime Minister of shielding itself behind the virus and that the virus was a lie. The virus and Modi were trying to divide India and spread hate, homogenize, and Hinduise, those protesting sought to unite and spread love, tolerance, and message of secularism. The narratives across the different political communications mediums conjured upbeatness and collective pride among those who protested against the juggernaut called Modi. The left-liberals and political scions went on record to say that the contagious virus’s narrative was a sham to break and disperse the protestors (which had ample visibility of women, most of whom were attired in burkhas and wore the hijab) of the many Shaheen Baghs across urban India. Overall the PMO had a daunting task before Modi could take back control of the situation by announcing *Janata Curfew*.

The day selected for the *Janata Curfew* was a Sunday, and the *Janata* responded to the Prime Minister’s call for solidarity and expression of gratitude at a select time applauding the ‘Corona Yoddhas’ (frontline workers during the Pandemic) through clapping of hands, beating of utensils, blowing of conches. News channels telecast these images in real-time, and within minutes the news clips and videos of the Modi assigned tasks for the *Janata* became viral and travelled across geographies in the form of viral videos and memes. The collective response of people (*Janata*) going out to their balconies and to the streets to applaud was unthinkable. Modi’s ‘charm of offensive’ could consolidate back his position only after the hugely successful nation-wide response to the call for lighting up candles and change the narrative from religion to national health emergency and the necessity of inter-state dialogues.

The opposition and the left-liberals were taken aback at the response Modi received. The left-liberals trolled the government in the virtual platforms for choosing a Sunday for a *Janata*

*Curfew*. They challenged the government to select any other day and see the open defiance of Modi's call. The shaheen baghs across the country from Delhi to Park Circus in Kolkata defied the call of *Janata Curfew* in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>27</sup>

## The Contagion and the Contagious

The contagious nature of the virus, its impact on 'public health' and 'public order' began to slowly engage the social imaginaries of good health, well-being, and sanitization. The mass media in all its formats had successfully spun the diverse narratives of social imaginaries into a political one of protecting the nation from the threat of a common enemy and singling the source of the spread of the virus.

The first Covid-19 casualty was reported from the southern Indian state of Karnataka on 12 March 2020. The official report of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 13 March 2020 maintained that the country was not yet experiencing a health emergency. It was an unfortunate coincidence that on the same day, a vast gathering took place in Delhi, organized by the 'fringe Muslim organization Tablighi Jamaat'. It subsequently proved to be the case that this was a significant source of infection. This event—which coincided, it must be said, with huge gatherings at Hindu religious sites on the same day—was cynically exploited, once its consequences became known, to stoke communalism. Arnab Goswami through his news channel Republic TV selectively picked the Jamatis and proclaimed that the 'singular determination of the Tablighi Jamaat was to spread the virus in our country.'<sup>28</sup>

The idea that it was Muslims who had brought COVID-19 to India provided some cover for the government, which did very little to check such accusations or the subsequent wave of Muslim-baiting on social media. The government also exploited the circumstances of the epidemic to stifle opposition by closing down dissent in the media<sup>29</sup> and arresting critics on seemingly arbitrary grounds.<sup>30</sup>

The manufactured enemy identified as the 'virus carrier' / 'superspreaders' and a threat to the nation was the Tablighi Jamaat<sup>31</sup> collectives followed by hashtag movements such as "coronaJihad," "CoronaTerrorism," and "CoronaBombsTablighi." Such strategies offered grand narratives of combating a travelling alien virus and communalizing its spread. In the narration of

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-kolkata-s-shaheen-bagh-says-sit-in-will-continue-1658312-2020-03-22> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>28</sup> Asim Ali, "Coronavirus Was a Test of Secular Nationalism," ThePrint, 1 April 2020, <https://theprint.in/opinion/coronavirus-test-of-secular-nationalism-tablighi-jamaat-became-scapegoat/392764/> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>29</sup> Vinu Goel and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Under Modi, India's Press is not so free anymore" New York Times, 2 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/asia/modi-india-press-media.html> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>30</sup> "India's Government Is Better at Curbing Critics than COVID-19," The Economist, 9 May 2020, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2020/05/09/indias-government-is-better-at-curbing-critics-thancovid-19> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-corona-outbreak-afflicted-by-communal-virus-blaming-tablighi-jamaat-could-be-misdirected/349784> retrieved 20 May 2020

Coronavirus's visit to India, the story of Tablighi Jamaat and the ensuing debates<sup>32</sup> on 'responsible/irresponsible behaviour'<sup>33</sup> and the holding of the entire Muslim community responsible for the nation-wide spread of the virus forms the braid of the Contagion and the contagious. Questions that loom<sup>34</sup> significant include how more than a thousand people stayed inside a campus without the police's knowledge and the administration right under the government's (both the Centre (BJP led) and the state (Delhi, AAP)) nose following the National Capital Region's communal riots.

### **The Fear Locking the Nation: 'Stay Home, Stay Safe'**

Charting a nation-wide response to the Lockdown and its differential effects is a daunting task. The nation-wide Lockdown in India<sup>35</sup> (by invoking the Disaster Management Act of 2005) has not gone without its share of discrepancies and unsettledness. In all its phases, the Lockdown has sent tremors and ripple effects in India's federal order.<sup>36</sup> The states have accused the Centre of not consulting<sup>37</sup> them before calling the closure. The Centre has remained tight-lipped and maintained an official silence leaving things befuddled. The response to the Pandemic directly touched on two core areas, namely 'public health' and 'public order,' both placed in the State List of the Indian Constitution. The issue of control and regulation of the spread of the contagious disease is in the Concurrent List, and the overall disbursement of finances are with the Centre.

The official response to the Lockdown's criticisms seems to tell that this was evident and needed no clarification; it was common-sense. The message in the bottle was that the *Janata Curfew* was a prelude to the Lockdown. However, the idea of the nation-wide Lockdown in just a few hours was imprudent; also, not considering the issue of migrant workers with state governments compounded the dystopia.

The media, in its disparate platforms, documented the official commands and the protesting voices. The Lockdown 0.1 phase, in minimal ways, conveyed the contagious nature of the virus and required behavioural mechanisms to remain unlearned. The political communications of the Centre and the health and social distancing guidelines were ridiculed and belittled in the virtual public sphere and defied in the physical. The Lockdown response differed across the regions: the Northeastern states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Sikkim showed exemplary feats during the lockdown phases and in wayfinding a reaction to the virus through

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tablighi-row-entire-muslim-community-cannot-be-held-responsible-for-one-groups-crime-says-naqvi/article31413837.ece> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>33</sup> <https://thewire.in/communalism/coronavirus-criminal-liability-of-tablighi-jamaat> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/13/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-targeting-muslims-spread-in-india> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-coronavirus-lockdown-day-1-updates-march-25-2020/article31159466.ece> retrieved 26 March 2020

<sup>36</sup> <https://ahmedabadmirror.indiatimes.com/ahmedabad/others/how-the-lockdown-is-triggering-a-constitutional-crisis/articleshow/75511511.cms> retrieved 10 May 2020

<sup>37</sup> <https://scroll.in/article/957239/can-the-union-government-bypass-the-states-and-declare-a-lockdown> retrieved 28 March 2020

negotiations and synchronizations of logistics amidst precarity and outdated resources. However, this wayfinding lost their sheen during the unlocking stages, and the infected cases increased multifold with the homecoming of the migrants from elsewhere in trains and other transport. Again, it drove the point that 'Locking' and 'Unlocking' required differential recalibrations of strategies.

The lethality of the virus had not settled in the collective imaginaries of the people, which was in sync with the images and videos in circulation in the social media, the newsroom chats, reportage, etc. The gravity of the Pandemic downplayed. The communication for social distancing, staying indoors, work from Home (including the Work hours<sup>38</sup>), the school from Home, no pink slips to workers, no salary cuts, etc. remained mostly unintelligible. Indians were negotiating with new times.

The left-liberals strummed a cacophony projecting India as a fascist state with restricted right to mobility, bodies caged in quarantine centres, and the migrants irrespective of class and job differentials subjected to new norms of sanitization, intrusive technologies, and routine testing including thermal scans at various points of exits and entries.

The sanghis (a common shorthand for the umbrella of the Sangh Parivaar) in predictable response countered the narratives with viral videos, and messages to justify the time and duration of the Prime Minister's communication to the nation lines of 'graha- nakshatra' (astrology and astronomy)<sup>39</sup>. The sanghis strummed the narrative that India would beat the virus<sup>40</sup> out of the country by clapping, playing the drums, blowing conch shells, crackers, and lighting lamps.<sup>41</sup> India suddenly took refuge in belief in supernaturals, in contrast to the shared ideals of scientific temper. The left-liberals trolled the sanghis oblivious of similar references to supernatural beliefs and destiny from their turf equating the NPR, NRC, and CAA to black magic<sup>42</sup>, or that the summer heat would kill the virus or the strain that entered India would be a weak one. The virus would die on its own or bank on the destiny of herd immunity, which in operation is epidemiological neo-liberalism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>The PTI on 20 November 2020 reported: The Labour Ministry has proposed maximum 12 working hours in a day inclusive of intervals under the draft rules on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code 2020 passed earlier this year by Parliament. However, the weekly working hours limit has been fixed at 48 hours (six days X eight hours, with one weekly off) under the draft rules notified on 19 November 2020.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/labour-ministry-proposes-12-working-hours-higher-than-8-hours-day-in-osh-code-passed-by-parliament/2133033/> retrieved 23 November 2020

<sup>39</sup><https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-is-pm-modi-taking-cue-from-vedic-times-to-defeat-coronavirus/350018> retrieved 15 April 2020

<sup>40</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/fact-check/story/social-media-users-give-misleading-twist-pm-modi-janta-curfew-1658195-2020-03-21> retrieved 10 May 2020

<sup>41</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdARcViiXAA> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>42</sup><https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/caa-nrc-npr-like-black-magic-mamata-banerjee-west-bengal-chief-minister-585935> retrieved 10 February 2020

<sup>43</sup><https://economicsociology.org/2020/04/24/herd-immunity-is-epidemiological-neoliberalism/> retrieved 20 May 2020

## **Locking, Unlocking and the Homebound**

The Centre's later phases of the Lockdown gave a freer hand to the states to mitigate and negotiate the virus. However, few states felt it was too late to collect their logistics in order and face the wave of migrant returnees. The states and the Centre continued to accuse each other of fudging data relating to COVID-19 deaths. Queries related to the COVID-19 from the Centre were interpreted as an intrusion to alter the federal rhythm. The endless pictures in circulation in the media of migrants walking back Home created new brownies to be scored between the political parties and governments in power at the states and the Centre, and the opportunity to photo-document the plight of the least advantaged in dystopic times of the Pandemic. The questions that loomed largely were why were the migrants forced to walk back home? Who ousted them in the first place? Why were lockdown norms not adhered, and why did the states not gate the passages and the highways? Why were the migrants not provided with a safe, secured, and sanitized shelter? The governments at the state have accused the Centre's sudden Lockdown without consultation to be the answer to the unpreparedness to regulate and address the internal migrants' plight. The Centre's defence to this has been that internal migration in India is a state subject. With the rise in numbers, the struggle between the states and the Centre has worsened. Each state is spinning its strategies and negotiations with the Centre. The situation in the national capital of Delhi is appalling with the governments discrediting each other<sup>44</sup> and engaging in constant pressure, throttle, and truce.

## **Ghar Chale? (Let us go Home?)**

The reverse mobility of the migrants to their 'Desh' (home states, ancestral villages as we call it in South Asia) marks uncanny resemblance to the restive response to the travel of the alien mobile virus. The migrant like the virus is seen as the source of the problem to be quarantined so that everybody else is safe and sanitized. The uneven logistic grids and the urban dystopia remain unruffled by the coming of an unwanted guest. The virtual public sphere also began to examine and challenge existing ideas about migrants critically. Who is a migrant? Who is a local (Bhoomiputra)? The traditionally accepted cleavages such as caste, ethnicity, linguistics, and the appendages of class, education, etc. are all embroiled into the broth of a complicated grid of a migrant in contemporary India. The lack of strategies and coordination for improving migrant workers' plight has exposed the severe defect in India's federal structure and enfeebled the idea of a Union of States.

The left-liberals and the sanghis by the closure of the lockdown phase 0.4 realized the COVID- 19 pandemic gravity. They controlled themselves from exhibiting their virtual diarrhea on virtual/online platforms. However, few political parties and their leaderships continued to showcase their skills in communicating politically senile statements and declaring the Lockdown a failure as it could not control the number of causalities and transmission of the virus. These statements signalled that the leadership failed to grasp the purpose of the Lockdown/quarantine. The purpose of the Lockdown was to procrastinate the spread of the virus and to give time to the country/community to wayfind its mechanisms of negotiating the virus.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sc-asks-centre-and-delhi-govt-why-migrant-workers-rushed-to-border-on-march-28/articleshow/76056734.cms> retrieved 29 May 2020



## **Problematizing Public Health and Global Concerns: Everchanging Narratives and Perspectives**

Public health took a centre-stage in global concerns with the outbreak of COVID-19. It raised very uncomfortable questions in our everyday conversations: Where did it come from? How did it spread? How long will it stay? The origin of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has attracted a wealth of attention and speculation from scientists, government officials, and media commentators. The exact means of zoonotic transmission remain unclear, but there is a broad consensus that the condition caused by the virus, known as COVID-19, first appeared in Wuhan in late 2019. The role attributed to the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in responding to the outbreak has varied dramatically, ranging from accusations of negligence in allowing the virus to spread outside its borders to assertions of its success in controlling the outbreak through extensive quarantine and rapid resource mobilization.

Distinct cultures and the politics of science and medicine have contributed to strikingly variable national responses to this global crisis. In South Korea and Taiwan, epidemiologists have employed contact tracing, border surveillance, and increased dissemination of face masks. In the United States, federal authorities imposed barriers to early diagnostic testing, and President Donald Trump promoted the drug hydroxychloroquine despite a lack of evidence for its therapeutic efficacy. Swedish officials have articulated the concept of herd immunity, in contrast to standard epidemiological usage, as a means by which the majority of a population might gain immunity to COVID-19 by contracting it. In each case, the groups and individuals involved have tended to claim objectivity that is itself historically contingent and unstable.<sup>45</sup> The WHO in tune kept changing its narrative on the 'virus' and the Pandemic.

## **Restricted Mobilities, Regulated Safety: New Domesticity and recalibrations**

The Lockdown or quarantine in its own ways evolved a trend towards how to spend our time at Home. Thousands of "lifestyle" blogs, vlogs popped up seemingly overnight featuring Yoga- meditation, calming techniques, the 'healthy' *Ghar ka khana* (homemade food), easy hacks-to baking skills, to photo displaying homemade cakes, cookies, besan ka ladoo, families leaving their city lives and living off farmhouses, basking in nature, breathing fresh air, children enjoying the sunshine and mud, to carpentry and gardening skills. The Pandemic unleashed new norms of restricted mobilities and regulated safety through the use of masks, sanitizers- gadgets of sanitization.

The Lockdown and the unlocking period became an opportunity for celebrities (local, regional, national) to video-document their ordinariness and reinvent themselves in a more agrarian, rustic, DIY ('Do It Yourself') ethos. Gendered constructions of household chores waned under the Lockdown, and a new domesticity<sup>46</sup> of engaging in washing dishes, cooking, sweeping, and sanitizing took centre stage.

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Augusta Brazelton. (2020). Viral Reflections: Placing China in Global Health Histories. *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 79, No. 3 (August) 2020: 579–588. doi:10.1017/S0021911820002284

<sup>46</sup> <https://arktimes.com/arkansas-blog/2020/05/02/working-women-covid-19-and-the-new-domesticity> retrieved 21 May 2020

The new domesticity began to be viewed as badges of honour after two decades of being flooded by convenience products packaged as ready-made food by the grocery industry and the recent app-based food delivery/ food on-call/ food on wheels services such as Zomato, Swiggy etc. The new domesticity challenged the ideas that advertisement and skewed ideas of liberation and empowerment drew to the forefront. The advertisement industry in the last decades premised itself on the idea that ‘healthy food’ could be ordered from anywhere outside the kitchens in the Home, and that educated/professionals irrespective of gender should order food rather than make it. Social Imaginaries were injected with the idea that making your own food that is cooking and entering the kitchen or being able to navigate the kitchen was a middle-class thing, archaic, repressive deeply patriarchal. And being educated, financially stable and empowered one ought to be able to order food and get it delivered, and if need be reverse the patriarchal gender order of the kitchen. Ordering food was definitely superior to cooking it. Also, the punch line in the social imaginaries was that it saved time for individuals to invest more attention in work that had its dividends in terms on money. Neo-liberal drive of time management, and money making were deeply embedded in the seemingly innocuous spaces of food and cooking.

The Pandemic reversed the priority chain, and DIY became fashionable, suddenly ‘cooking’ and household work became necessary life skills for all genders. The new domesticity reversed the notions about gardening, sewing, knitting and personal grooming etc. Suddenly learning from grandparents and the elders at Home opened newer vistas of home-schooling in most families.

Two essential questions that echoed through the virtual public sphere were related to the lack of sanitizers in the markets and the need to redefine ‘essential commodities’ in India. For the question related to the availability of sanitizers in the markets, the ingenuity of the Indian *jugaad* came into rescue. The college and university laboratories and also, the new domesticity DIY herbal sanitizers churned these concoctions for sanitization at the initial stages of the Lockdown. This *jugaad* helped larger pharmaceuticals and new enterprises the much needed time to come up with large scale production to meet the requirements of the markets.

### **Are We Safe?**

The Pandemic has made more visible the indelibility of adhocism, and the tokenism in everyday of the State, politics and societies in India. The State (and the governments at the Centre and the state) has conveniently taken the avatar of a fence-sitter while watching and expecting the dystopia to settle itself in order or somehow wayfind its alignments and reshape itself sooner or later.

The unintelligible conversations between the Centre and the state remain more visible and marked by political brinkmanship and showmanship and showing faint signs of ‘public good’ or effectually affecting the ‘last person’ in the hierarchy of things. The non-consensus on the closing/reopening of railways/train services<sup>47</sup> while the continuation of air/flight services

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<sup>47</sup> <https://thewire.in/government/indian-railways-migrant-workers-fare> retrieved 20 May 2020



(*Vande Bharat program*<sup>48</sup>) can be a point of discussion to drive forward the privileges of class concerns in decision making and policy implementation. The questions related to the migrants remained unaddressed.

The unlocking is a new game altogether requiring recalibrations of newly acquired behavioural changes to negotiate the virus during the Lockdown. We miss to understand that the virus is a new version of an older one and is still shifting its strains/traits, virologists and experts are grappling to comprehend it. Medication is still in the process of making. The phases of Lockdown gave way to the stage of unlocking, the Centre<sup>49</sup> and the states in India<sup>50</sup> began to converse in a language intelligible to each other. They churned the mantra from Jaap Goudsmit's book, *Viral Fitness* (2004), of 'living with the virus'<sup>51</sup> to serve their distinctive ends. The message that we take Home is that the virus has come and that it has decided to be an overstaying guest. The governments in all its hierarchies and its multifaceted linkages will not take responsibility for individual lives. All that humans have learned in the past 100 years in terms of sociability, staying connected, and the evolved idea of the magic of the human touch, health, sanitation, hygiene, medication, and medical interventions changed overnight from Wuhan to Washington and Oslo to Ushuaia. Sanitizers, social distancing, Masks became the gadgets or gears of isolation and protection. These recalibrations of the 'Social'<sup>52</sup>, 'Health,' and technology-mediated experiences, have reintroduced alienation of a newer version. These are new motifs around which Indians will have to recalibrate and negotiate their everyday and engage with newer assemblages of the Pandemic and the dystopia.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://theprint.in/national-interest/vande-bharat-vs-bharat-ke-bande-can-narendra-modi-be-losing-his-political-touch-so-soon/417506/> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>49</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/people-must-learn-to-live-with-the-virus-follow-prevention-guidelines-govt/articleshow/75629478.cms> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.opindia.com/2020/06/mamata-banerjee-kolkata-coronavirus-cases-contain-relaxation-lockdown-sleep-with-virus-pillow-cyclone-amphan/> retrieved 15 June 2020

<sup>51</sup> S. Wolinsky. Living with viruses. *Nature* 433, 360–361 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1038/433360a>  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/433360a> retrieved 20 May 2020

<sup>52</sup> <https://theconversation.com/creating-new-social-divides-how-coronavirus-is-reshaping-how-we-see-ourselves-and-the-world-around-us-137485> retrieved 20 May 2020

## A Comparative Understanding of Travelogues Connecting India and China

Barnali Chandra\*

Gadadhar Singh, the Indian soldier departed from Calcutta as part of a British regiment to fight the Boxer rebels in Qing China in March, 1900. He was a soldier in the international expedition (China Relief) which is a multinational force of eight nations organized in the summer of 1900 to march on the capital city of Beijing, then lift the siege of the Foreign Legations and defeat the insurgent Boxer rebels. He was the member of the 7<sup>th</sup> Rajput Regiment which was mobilized in India to fight in China on behalf of the British. Another soldier, Ashutosh Ray, in the month of August in 1900 started for China via Singapore and Hongkong in the peninsular and oriental company's ship called "Shonda" with the same purpose. Their mission was to defeat the ruling Qing dynasty, which openly sided with the Boxer Uprising and its anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement<sup>1</sup>. They were amongst those many Indians who served in the British Indian army and fought wars in China. Gadhadhar Singh, in his diary *Chin Me Terah Mas* (Thirteen Months in China) mentions India and China as huge and superior civilizations that has shared cultural and civilizational heritage and was connected through Buddhism. He mentions about his special connection to China as it was in distress and evidently this sentiment grew out of his concern of the possibility of China succumbing to a foreign rule. Gadhadhar Singh like Ashutosh Ray predicted that China is going to suffer the same fate as India under the foreign rule. Both of them describe their experiences in China as a soldier. Ashutosh Ray and Gadadhar Singh gave an eye-witness account of the great war in China in 1900-1901 AD. Both provide a brief history of China and Japan, their customs and practices, religious beliefs, cuisine and details of the military and state and also the significant religious and cultural places. Their narratives describe the Boxer Rebellion and foreign occupation.

Ashutosh Ray's service to British took him to many places in China. The year of 1900 was a socio-politically unstable year. During this time of Boxer rebellion, there was constant friction with the foreign forces, missionary and the Manchu army. The British had sent the 16<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Bengal from Kolkata. They tortured and murdered common Chinese people. Ashutosh Ray's connection with this regiment cannot be discarded<sup>2</sup>. Satishchandra Bhattacharya and Amulyadhan Chattopadhyay also accompanied him in this mission. We can find a fine picture of them standing on the Great Wall of China. Ashutosh examines the nationalist sentiment of Chinese people very closely and cites different examples how Chinese people react to the revolutionaries as well as the British soldiers.

Another traveler Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay traveled to China in 1902 on an official undertaking while serving the British. Kedarnath, an upper caste, elite British servant sarcastically reacts in a bitter way to the world's compassionate response to the Boxer Rebellion.

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<sup>1</sup> Gadādharaśimha, , Anand A. Yang, Kamal Sheel, and Ranjana Sheel. *Thirteen Months in China: A Subaltern Indian and the Colonial World : an Annotated Translation of Thakur Gadadhar Singh's Chīn Me Terah Mās.* , 2019. Internet resource. P-2

<sup>2</sup> Ray Ashutosh. *Chin Prabash.*, 2013. Jadavpur University Press. P-9

He calls it ‘Boxer trouble’ (or Boxer *hungama*) and retorts, “The crow died in Kamakhya and the howl is heard in Vrindavan” (কামিখ্যেতে কাক মরেছে, বৃন্দাবনে হাহাকার). People from all over India and different parts of Asia are gathered on the ship and they speak different languages. Amitav Ghosh would call a ship like this ‘a floating Babel of tongues’<sup>3</sup>. Kedarnath observes different people and describes their activities in an amusing manner which exhibits his classist, casteist and discriminatory attitude towards other Bengalis and people from other provinces on the ship. He himself says that his narrative should not be called travelogue but a ‘drawing room conversation’<sup>4</sup>. The narratives of Ashutosh Ray, Gadadhar Singh and Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay are not monolithic but through those singular voices multiple proliferating voices can be heard which describe the situation of the soldiers, their co-passengers on the ships, about the market places, the streets and the lives of the common people in Hong Kong and Mainland China.

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an extraordinary rise in travel across Asia and many travelogues were written both in Bengali and Chinese. In the twentieth century more than 25 Bengali travelogues, partially or entirely dedicated to China, have been written. We can divide them into four categories. Travelogues written between i) 1900 -1910 :Travelers worked under British government (Ashutosh Roy (1900), Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay (1902) ii) 1905-1920: Travelers interested in Chinese history, society (Indumadhab Mallick, Binoy Kumar Sarkar) iii) 1925-1940: Travelers involved in revolutionary activities (Ramnath Biswas, Bimal Mukherjee) 1945-1960: Travelers invited by the communist party of China (late 1940’s and 1950’s).

Unlike Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay, Gadadhar Singh and Ashutosh Roy in spite of serving the British regiment raised questions about the exploitative and brutal British government. Their travel experiences across the south-east Asian countries, Hong Kong, Singapore and China developed subaltern sentiments about the empire and civilization they allied with<sup>5</sup>. The remarkable cultural and civilizational connection between India and China compelled them to evaluate and rethink about the relation between these two civilizations. This is a time when India, China and the rest of Asia witnessed the rise of Pan Asianism advocated by the Japanese Scholar Okakura Kakuzo who held powerful nationalist sentiment and believed in Asia’s civilizational unity. His visit to India towards the end of 1901 where he met Surendranath Tagore and Sister Nivedita (Swami Vivekananda’s Irish follower) influenced and defined his thoughts. In his 1903 book Okakura said that Asia was ‘One’ and India and China are two mighty civilizations connected through Buddhism<sup>6</sup>. This discourse on Pan Asianism and the possibility of approaching Asia through intra-Asian trajectories<sup>7</sup> attracted many young Chinese and Indian revolutionaries and thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore and Zhang Taiyan<sup>8</sup>. Ashutosh Ray and Gadadhar Singh’s narratives repeatedly emphasized on such ideals. Both Ashutosh Ray and Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay had drawn references to Tagore’s poems at various points in

<sup>3</sup> Ghosh, Amitav. "Of Fanas and Forecasts: the Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail." *Economic and Political Weekly*. 43.25 (2008): 56-62. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Kedarnath Bandyopadhyay, Chin Jatri

<sup>5</sup> Sen, Tansen. *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*. , 2017. Internet resource, P-298

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/ioe/ioe03.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Gadādharaśiṃha, , Anand A. Yang, Kamal Sheel, and Ranjana Sheel. *Thirteen Months in China: A Subaltern Indian and the Colonial World : an Annotated Translation of Thakur Gadadhar Singh's Chīn Me Terah Mās*. , 2019. Internet resource. P-24

<sup>8</sup> Sen, Tansen. *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*. , 2017. Internet resource, P-298

their narratives. The trend of crossing physical and ideological boundaries also started with Vivekananda who was voyaging through *kala pani* by violating the 'rules' set by Hinduism as well as he is the pioneering figure to redefine the lost glory of Hinduism which he executes successfully at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago (1893). His travel account *Paribrajak* was published in 1902. Swami Vivekananda's tongue in cheek humour and often sharpened comparison of the Asian countries with Indians were clearly visible.

Two of such many travelers who were inspired by Tagore's poems, life and voyages to China were Ramnath Biswas (1894-1955) (traveled to China from 1931 to 1934) and Tan Yunshan (1898-1983) (traveled to India from 1928 to 1931). The idea of Pan Asianism mixed with Tagore's idea of universalism motivated travelers to explore beyond the boundaries. Tagore's counter-nationalist position also deeply influenced many travelers. In all these travelogues, travel is an act of performance, a means of building knowledge systems about the traveling countries and also an identity building enterprise for colonial subjects. Ramnath Biswas traveled to China in 1931 and returned in 1934. In Ramnath's narrative we find that travel for him is a means, an act of understanding the other. Belonging to the Bengali gentry family, Ramnath turned into an explorer at a very young age. While working under the British government he got himself involved in the revolutionary activities. During tumultuous years of Sino-Japanese war he visited China and witnessed the imperial oppression, revolutionary activities of the communists and the livelihood of the common people. As he travels, Ramnath keeps a diary to document his everyday experiences. After his return to Kolkata, he started writing the book on the basis of his diary. In his book the racial, ethnic, imperial and nationalist struggles are embedded in the framework of the account. The adventure and the journey becomes an intriguing trope. His account is a parallel discourse to the intellectual history of the period.

Tan Yunshan (1898-1983) visited India almost the time when Tan Yunshan also traveled India (1928-1931). As Tansen Sen mentions<sup>9</sup>, Tan Yunshan is the person who was responsible for merging the earlier romanticism of Liang Qichao and Rabindranath Tagore, the political aspirations of pan-Asianism promoted by Nehru and Chiang Kai-shek, and the academic study of the historical interactions between India and China led by the Indian Sinologist P.C. Bagchi. Tan Yunshan brought these three streams to Cheena Bhavana. Tagore met him in Singapore in 1927. Tan was working as a teacher at a Chinese School and he was invited by Tagore. He accepted it and went to Santiniketan in 1928 where he stayed for a few months and both Tagore and Tan tried to establish a center for China Studies for which Tagore needed fund. Tan was in contact with the Guomindang (GMD) government officials and when he returned to China in 1931 he was able to secure funds from the Nationalist Government in China for the establishment of the Chinese center at Visva-Bharati. As Tansen Sen mentioned, Tan Yunshan's Buddhist connections must be taken into account while evaluating Tan's role in the establishment of Cheena Bhavana<sup>10</sup>.

While he was in India, he traveled extensively and visited the Buddhist places but did not strictly limit his travelogue to describe those. He examined the British India and Gandhi and Tagore's roles in the anti-imperialist struggles. In his travelogue 《印度周遊記》 *Yinduzhou Youji*, Tan Yunshan (譚云山) describes his travel across Indian provinces and Buddhist spots

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<sup>9</sup> Sen, Tansen. *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*. , 2017. Internet resource, P-309

<sup>10</sup> Sen, Tansen. *India, China, and the World: A Connected History*. , 2017. Internet resource, P-309

during his travel between 1928 and 1931 while he was staying in India. The book was published in 1933. Both Ramnath and Tan Yunshan, during their travel consciously dissociated themselves in order to avoid generalization. Travelogues are special in this context. Travelogues are written on the basis of the memory and also with the help of the personal accounts like diary. Unlike a diary, travelogue imposes a structure to the randomness of the real time events occurred during the traveler's journey. There can be lapse of chronological coherence, gaps due to the willing suspension of information and confusion between the real time events (from the diary) and the synchronized narrative events (in the travelogue). The production of different knowledge systems are sustained through the narrative development. Both Ramnath and Tan Yunshan's narratives consciously try to avoid generalizations. For both of them, travel is a tool for producing different sorts of knowledge systems. Tan Yunshan in his narrative produces knowledge about Indian intellectuals and Indian struggle for freedom from his own perspective while Ramnath Biswas does the same for the communist revolutionaries, Guomindang and the Indians in China. Ramnath's eye-witness accounts about the Indian soldiers and merchants crates a unique stance. The semantics in the narrative is temporally and spatially variable and it comes with the traveler's dissociation to maintain his status as an unbiased witness. For both the travelers there is an attempt to balance between their identity and the cultural burden they carry with them.

Both Tan Yunshan and Ramnath Biswas had written about their experiences in the form of a travelogue. While taking the journey, the travelers already plan a book. Therefore the authenticity of the eye witness account has to be maintained. Writing travelogue is an identity building enterprise for the travelers. In the travelogues the travelers fabricate the world they travel for the readers and ultimately come out as a product of that travel. Ramnath starts as an explorer who empathizes with the communist revolutionaries and emerges as a person who eye witnessed the oppression of the exploitative colonial forces on the several stratum of lives of common people in China and realizes the striking civilizational similarities between India and China under this colonial regime. In the travelogue he also expresses his embarrassment of his own race who lack nationalistic emotions and patriotism. Tan Yunshan, after his journey across India returned to China only to come back and stay in India. The journey and the experiences are validated via readers with supportive documents of real historical presence, of historical events and people. These credentials are all supportive but not always committed to truth. Ramnath meets Raja Mahendra Pratap while traveling China. As it is documented in print the account comes to the readers as truth and the readers cannot venture to seek the truth in it as this incident has not been documented by anyone else. The textual world must represent the real world for the readers. In the author's narrative the traveler sports multiple identities. For Ramnath Biswas, the untranslatability of his identity first as a pious Hindu and then as an atheist traveler from the East Bengal<sup>11</sup> confuse the people he meets. By Bengali the Chinese people understands Sikhs and Pathan with whom the common Chinese people are angry because of their brutality at Shanghai during Boxer Rebellion. Even Ramnath has to face severe consequences because of these. So Ramnath's attempt to translate and transcend his identity is only a way to connect with the 'other', people of China. He becomes a Hindu, a Buddhist and an apolitical traveler at various points of time. Ramnath believes that the traveler can't be lost, traveler has to suffer and

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<sup>11</sup> Basu, Abhishek. "Performing Other-Wise: 'death-defying' China As Seen by Ramnath Biswas." *China Report*. 43.4 (2007): 485-499. Print. P-495

continue his journey with all odds and for Ramnath travel is a 'duty'. Ramnath identifies the difference between the self and the other and tries to understand the habits of people. From a traveler explorer he emerged as a patriotic traveler who critically looked at the Sindhi traders who are selling Japanese silk as Indian silk<sup>12</sup>. Ramnath adopted different means of earning for collecting money for his journey. He regularly wrote for 'The Malay Tribune' and while staying in Shanghai he had started a school where he taught English.

Tan Yunshan's account is beyond the typical travelogues written in Chinese. In his travelogue Tan speaks about Gandhi and Tagore's philosophy and their thoughts about India under British rules. He says that India is huge and has great and glorious history. Tan also believed that India and China, both the countries are connected through the great philosophy of Buddhism and this is the sacred place where the Ganges carries the remains of Buddha. Tan visited the five sacred Buddhist places, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, Lumbini and Shravasti. He visits the new capital in Delhi. He also went to meet Gandhi in Bardoli. After this he passed over Bombay and started his journey southwards to Madras and then returned to Kolkata. Tan Yunshan gives an overview of Visva-Bharati University and describes the unique aspects of the oriental education that Visva-Bharati follows. He describes the beautiful landscape and unique geographical location of Santiniketan. Tan appreciates the unique system and the extraordinary method that the institution has adopted to implement an effective education system. Tan Yunshan also gives an overview of the lifestyle of the teachers as well as the students of Visva-Bharati. While staying in Santiniketan, he had an opportunity to closely observe Tagore's life and his beautiful home. The narrative goes beyond the simple geographical details and engages with socio-political problems that commonly connects India and China. In his travelogue he tried to understand the culture and society of India. As scholar invited by Tagore and traveling across India, he sought for recognition and identity of his own. Thereafter he chooses to write the travelogue. He was very cautious of his recognition and tried to build an identity of his own. While traveling he took quite a few photos of himself which we can find in the book. Having a photo indicates a process of visual documentation. Both Ramnath and Tan Yunshan question, sympathize and keenly attempt to learn about the condition of people of the country under the colonial rule. Ramnath and Tan Yunshan in their travelogues emphasized on the civilizational territories and the cross-cultural transactions between the countries since the premodern time.

It is intriguing to examine how the documents on East Asia written during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century describe the extremely unstable social and political environments and provide a vivid account of both the topographical details and the human and governmental enterprises that contributed to the national progress. The travelogues document the transformative experiences of the narrator and his intentions to transfer such experiences to the entire middle-class community by acknowledging India and China as civilizational connected nation-states divided by the border and the potential of its people and the society that underwent numerous reform struggles and anti-imperialist movements. The ways in which the travelers come to terms with their new cultural and linguistic experiences and use these newly acquired perspectives to understand the countries they are traveling create a new discourse, providing the readers with a comparative perspective on the formation of new nation-states. In the travel narratives human interactions go beyond the typical stereotypes, breaking the boundaries between political propaganda and elements of curiosity and hospitality. The narratives reveal

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<sup>12</sup> Biswas, Ramnath. *Maranbijoyee Cheen*, Kolkata, 1941. P-169

how personal memory can be merged with the collective memory to conform to the political ideology. Emerging with the development of print culture and several other literary genres, such as novels and short stories, the travel narratives become a point of intersection of elements from various other genres<sup>13</sup>. With the shifting geographical, political, and social situations, conceptualizations of both the self and the others changed as well. Kolkata, as the first important commercial printing-press center in South Asia, created a dynamic literary space for travelers from across the social spectrum to give life to their experiences. In the travelogues the readers can find a deconstruction of the mythical stereotypes. The evaluation of the connections between the personal and the collective memories became an important means to substantiate the readers' knowledge about the past and their understanding of the present. A travelogue, holding a space between fiction and history, documents history as lived experience and with an understanding of new places, people, and milieus, the travelers share their personal and empirical space with a larger group of readers, enabling them to see the unforeseen and to understand what have not been conceptualized. This is a distinctive and meaningful way to study and understand the historical connections between India and China through the personal experiences of travelers.

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## Look East Strategy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Subhadeep Bhattacharya\*

*The Look East-turned-Act East Policy is undergoing an alteration in character in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The economic priorities are fast overtaken by defence and strategic priorities. India's opting out of the RCEP while affiliating with US-sponsored Indo-Pacific strategy is the proof of such change. However, India's weak naval strength and compulsions towards South Asian region impede India's aspiration for greater role in the Pacific region and push her to the sideline in the geopolitical theatre there. Therefore, India looks for an alliance with major powers in the Pacific to balance the 'Chinese threat' but such effort looks fragile.*

Former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, in his latest article, has wondered whether India is retreating from her Act East Policy. Referring to India's decision to opt out of the largest trading bloc of the East, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Secretary Saran opined, "You cannot hope to play a larger regional role from the margins of the regional economy. And that is where we find ourselves." He has also suggested that India is 'downgrading its role in East Asia Summit' since the External Affairs Minister rather than the Prime Minister attended the latest summit meeting of the bloc held virtually.<sup>1</sup> All these raise questions about the future of the much touted Look East Policy, rechristened as Act East Policy in 2014 by the new Narendra Modi government. It was claimed that "Under the new leadership in Delhi, India's Look East policy has morphed into a proactive Act East policy, which envisages accelerated across-the-board engagement between the two growth poles of a vibrant Asia."<sup>2</sup> Indeed since its inception in 1994 as Look East Policy, this East Asia policy of India has been the primary tool to cement India's economic and later strategic relations with the countries of the east via ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) at the multilateral level. Between 1994 and 2010, India gradually integrated herself with the larger geopolitics of East Asia via ASEAN Regional Forum (1995), East Asia Summit (2005) and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (2010). This is for the first time India stayed away from another larger regional integration initiative of East Asia, RCEP.

In this perspective, it will intriguing to explore whether India's Look East-turned-Act East Policy is undergoing any alteration in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>1</sup> Shyam Saran, 'Act East policy at stake', *The Tribune*, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/act-east-policy-at-stake-171881> (accessed on 20.11.20).

<sup>2</sup> Manish Chand, 'Act East: India's ASEAN Journey', November 10, 2014, Public Diplomacy, Ministry of External Affairs, Govt of India, <https://www.mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?24216/Act+East+Indias+ASEAN+Journey> (accessed on 20.11.20).



### ***Strategic objective of Look East-turned-Act East Policy***

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, “If you have to consider any question concerning South-East Asia, you cannot do so without India.”<sup>3</sup> India’s involvement in the Southeast Asian affairs under the Nehru government is well known, especially in liberating Indonesia and in Indochina affairs. Nehru made India an important player in the geopolitics of Southeast Asia, at least initially, between 1947 and 1955. Nehru considered India central to the Asian geopolitical map; “Geography is a compelling factor, and geographically she (India) is so situated as to be the meeting point of Western and Northern and Eastern and South-East Asia.”<sup>4</sup> It underlines Nehru’s conviction about making his country an important player in the post-war Asian geopolitics. This desire had its root in British India’s strategic dominance over the ‘Indo-Pacific region’, from South Africa to South China Sea. However, Nehru knew that a weak, partitioned India was incapable to step into the shoes of the British and thus opted for diplomatic manoeuvre of *Panchsheel* (peaceful coexistence) and NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) to maintain such influence in Southeast Asia. But the introduction of China to Southeast Asia at the Bandung Conference (by Nehru himself) in 1955 initiated the waning of India’s influence over the regional geopolitics eventually reducing India’s active role significantly. It was the unveiling of the official Look East Policy in 1994 that economic cooperation with East Asia, including ASEAN, was given priority.

The Look East Policy of the P.V. Narasimha Rao government was an economic strategy required to salvage the post-Cold War Indian economy suffering chronic crisis due to fall in the foreign exchange reserve which was attributed to Gulf war of 1991 and the loss of confidence in the government’s ability to deal with difficult economic situation.<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s famous *Singapore Lecture* of 8<sup>th</sup> September 1994 unveiled India’s Look East Policy.<sup>6</sup> Rao narrated India’s plan to engage economically with the Asia Pacific region saying that “the Asia-Pacific region will be our springboard to the global market-place”.<sup>7</sup> Here it is pertinent to mention that in post-Cold War period Indian strategy initially prioritized economy over security in its relations with ASEAN and beyond even when it was backyard of China since traditionally India’s strategic concern has been South Asia. This was the reason behind India’s quiescent role in the geopolitical landscape of East Asia since 1964. India even turned down Singaporean founder-premier Lee Kuan Yew’s request for military assistance in 1965 and to play a guardian’s role in Southeast Asia for at least ten years after the British withdrawal (in 1967).<sup>8</sup> According to many strategic thinkers of India, the traditional Indian strategic thinking of at least two thousand years has been how to achieve strategic unity of the Indian subcontinent and defend it from

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<sup>3</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru, *India’s Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, September 1946-April 1961*, New Delhi, The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961, p.22.

<sup>4</sup> Inaugural address at the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, March 23, 1947, *ibid*, p.250.

<sup>5</sup> Sanjay Baru, *1991: How P.V. Narasimha Rao Made History*, New Delhi, Aleph Book Company, 2016, p.5

<sup>6</sup> Singapore Lecture was later published. see Narasimha Rao, *India and Asia Pacific: Forging New Partnership: Singapore Lecture Series 1994*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1995

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Salil Tripathi, ‘Rao’s trips open up investment opportunities for India with economic ‘tigers’ of East, *India Today*, September 30, 1994, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/economy/story/19940930-rao-trip-opens-up-investment-opportunities-for-india-with-economic-tigers-of-east-809729-1994-09-30> (accessed on 15.06.20).

<sup>8</sup> Sunanda K. Datta Ray, *Looking East to Look West: Lee Kuan Yew’s Mission India*, Gurgaon, Penguin Books, 2009, pp.1, 132

external incursions.<sup>9</sup> The British *Raj* somehow managed to unite the subcontinent under single rule and was successful in warding off the external invaders (until Japanese invasion of Manipur in 1944), unlike previous rulers, with the help of allied Princely States and a buffer state system. During transfer of power in 1947 the British bequeathed sovereign India with buffers in the north, sea protection in the south and smaller states around her<sup>10</sup> and most importantly an acrimonious Pakistan. The later addition of China in 1964 as another major threat to India's territorial integrity and security shackled India further to her South Asian region. Thus India's priority to uphold her reputational power<sup>11</sup> in her immediate neighbourhood held India back from being active in the East.

Nevertheless, it will be improper to conclude that India's Look East Policy of the 1990s was bereaved of any strategic calculation, apart from economic considerations. G.V.C. Naidu identifies three-fold objectives of the Look East Policy; firstly, to establish linkages with ASEAN and its affiliates, secondly, to strengthen bilateral relations with individual ASEAN states and thirdly, to thwart Southeast Asia from slipping into the grip of any major power's, especially Chinese, influence.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, throughout the 1990s, India did develop bilateral defence relations with individual ASEAN countries: Malaysia-India Defence Committee (MIDCOM) which first met in 1993 focusing on training Malaysian defence personnel, *Lion King* series of naval exercises with Singapore, which started in 1993, and SIMBEX naval exercise since 1999, naval exercises with Thailand since 1995, defence cooperation with Cambodia and Myanmar.<sup>13</sup> However, all the countries named here are important littorals of the Indian Ocean and Malacca Strait maritime region. Since India's prime strategic maritime concern lies in the Indian Ocean-Bay of Bengal maritime zone, cooperation with these countries are vital. Besides, inauguration of the *Milan* naval exercise by India in 1995 in the Indian Ocean region along with Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Sri Lanka underlined India's maritime security priority zone.

Eminent historian-turned diplomat K.M. Panikkar, referring to Indian history, said, "...whoever controls the Indian Ocean has India at his mercy."<sup>14</sup> He further added that Indian Ocean is the vital sea to India and said shouldering responsibility of peace and security of the Indian Ocean region was vital for India's freedom.<sup>15</sup> India could relax under British naval protection until its withdrawal after 1967 while her security establishment went jittery following the entry of hostile *USS Enterprise* aircraft carrier in Bay of Bengal to assist Pakistan during the 1971 war. It exposed India's vulnerability to naval threat. Thus, it was India's maritime neighbourhood concern that drew India closer to her maritime neighbours in Southeast Asia rather than any intention to expand her naval influence in the Pacific region in 1990s. This cooperation was also important to allay the fear of the ASEAN. ASEAN suspected India's naval

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *Emerging Power: India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.10

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp.16,17

<sup>11</sup> Reputational power is the ability to influence without attempting to exercise influence, *ibid*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> G.V.C. Naidu, 'Whither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.28, No.2, Apr-Jun, 2004, Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, p.332.

<sup>13</sup> For details see Balveer Singh, 'Southeast Asia-India Defence Relations in the Changing Regional Security Landscape,' *IDSIA Monograph Series* No.4, May, 2011, Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi.

<sup>14</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean; An Essay on the influence of Sea Power on Indian History*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1951, p.84

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, pp.85, 91

intention concerning the international sea lanes of communication between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean. Besides, India's expansion of naval facilities in the Andaman Islands in Bay of Bengal in early 1990s was seen as an attempt to control the Malacca and other crucial straits which triggered debate about India's motives and military potentials to expand in Southeast Asia.<sup>16</sup> India's naval constructions in the Andaman Islands were exclusively meant for security of the Bay of Bengal and the Malacca Straits and not preface of any naval expansion plan in the Pacific region. Andaman and Nicobar Islands' strategic location in the Bay of Bengal-Indian Ocean-Malacca Straits region straddle the busiest trade routes of the world and it is the chief responsibility of the Indian Navy was to keep it safe and sanitised, integral to the security of the Indian Ocean region.

Therefore, India's maritime defence strategy has been concentrating more on the immediate Indian Ocean zone rather than on the waters of the East. Here, the statement of India's former navy chief Admiral Nirmal Verma is mention worthy who highlighted in 2012 that Indian Ocean and not the Pacific is the priority of the Indian Navy;

“...from our perspective the primary areas of interest to us is from the Malacca Strait to the (Persian/Arabian) Gulf in the west, and to the Cape of Good Hope in the south... the Pacific and the South China Sea are of concern to us, but activation in those areas is not on the cards.”<sup>17</sup>

However, the Look East strategy in its 'Phase II', unveiled at the turn of the new century, shifted focus from economic issues of Phase I (1990s) to economic and security issues including joint efforts to protect sea lanes, coordination on counter terrorism etc., as was declared by foreign minister Yashwant Sinha in 2003 at the India-ASEAN Business Summit.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, protection of sea lanes mission was extended from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific region in the South China Sea at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said in 2003, “Our security environment ranges from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca across the Indian Ocean...and Southeast Asia. Our strategic thinking has also to extend to these horizons.”<sup>19</sup> His successor Dr. Manmohan Singh remarked in 2004 that India's strategic footprint covers....Southeast Asia and beyond' following which then Navy Chief Arun Prakash said in 2005, “it is imperative for India...to retain a strong maritime capability in order to maintain a balance of maritime power in the Indian Ocean, as well as larger Asia Pacific region.”<sup>20</sup> It is mention worthy here that the budget allocation for the navy during this time climbed up from 14 per cent during 1999-2000 to 18.9 per cent in 2008-09.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> G.V.C. Naidu, 'Whither the Look East Policy', p.335

<sup>17</sup> 'Navy Chief says Indian Ocean is priority, not South China Sea', *Business Standard*, August 8, 2012, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/navy-chief-says-indian-ocean-is-priority-not-south-china-sea-112080802019\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/navy-chief-says-indian-ocean-is-priority-not-south-china-sea-112080802019_1.html) (accessed on 30.07.20).

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Govt of India, Media Center, September 4, 2003, <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/4843/Remarks+by+Shri+Yashwant+Sinha+External+Affairs+Minister+of+India+at+The+Plenary+Session+Second+India++ASEAN+Business+Summit> (accessed on 21.11.20).

<sup>19</sup> cited in Subhadeep Bhattacharya, *Understanding South China Sea Geopolitics*, New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2017, p.215.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in *ibid*, p.216

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p.216

Therefore, we see that with the turn of the new century India gradually shifted her focus to the South China Sea region from the Indian Ocean region. This shift had economic reasons with the expanding commercial transactions with the East since the unveiling of the Look East Policy. The 2009 maritime doctrine of the Indian Navy underlined that national security objective includes the security of maritime trade routes. However, the doctrine's primary focus was IOR (Indian Ocean Region) while South and East China Seas, Western Pacific Ocean and their littoral regions were termed as India's secondary areas of maritime interest.<sup>22</sup> This is intriguing since the 2004 maritime doctrine of the Indian Navy clearly said that India's area of interests extends from the north of the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.<sup>23</sup> This proves that South China Sea abuts the Indian Ocean, both in terms of geographic location as well as strategic and security priority concern.

India's Act East strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been to join the emerging geopolitical competition of the East more as an actor in the supporting role rather than in the lead role, unlike what was the case during Nehru's time. At that time India guided the many countries of the region like Burma (today's Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos and Indonesia to follow *Panchsheel* (vis-à-vis China) and NAM model to lure them away from joining the camp politics of the Cold War. This policy continued in the post-Nehru period also, although not so actively, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi, while visiting Indonesia in 1969, negated the notion of power vacuum floated following the British withdrawal from the region insisting that the 'countries of our region can themselves fill the vacuum.'<sup>24</sup> Singapore's first ambassador to New Delhi Maurice Baker argued (in 1967) that in the context of the (possible) American withdrawal (from Vietnam) it would encourage subversion and revolt and thus India's role to ensure Southeast Asia's security 'would be a great contribution to world peace' but then acknowledged that it was a 'wishful thinking to expect it.'<sup>25</sup> This was because India was not inclined to play any role in the security of Southeast Asia given her priorities in South Asia and Indian Ocean region reflected in Bangladesh Liberation War (1971) and later missions in Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles and Sri Lanka in the 1980s. In a way, India gradually moved to the sideline of the geopolitical theatre of East Asia since 1964.

India's eventual rapport with the ASEAN and its affiliates throughout the 1990s and early 2000s paved the way for her integration with the East Asian geopolitics of the new century. C. Raja Mohan claims that India's rise generated expectations which 'begun to inject new dynamism into India's relations with great powers of Asia' like USA, China and Japan and therefore, 'India may no longer be marginal to either the regional politics of East Asia or great power system that shapes Asia-Pacific theater.'<sup>26</sup> However, India failed to make her presence felt convincingly in the region. On the contrary, India chose to maintain a

<sup>22</sup> *Indian Maritime Doctrine 2009*, Indian Navy, Strategic Publication 1.1, pp.6,68.

<https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian-Maritime-Doctrine-2009-Updated-12Feb16.pdf> (accessed on 23.11.20).

<sup>23</sup> cited in Tridib Chakraborti and Subhadeep Bhattacharya, 'South China Sea Imbroglio: Problems, Outcome and India's Stand', *Policy Brief* No.5, December 2012, Institute of Foreign Policy Studies, University of Calcutta, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in V.P. Dutt, *India's Foreign Policy*, New Delhi, Vani Educational Books, 1985, p.267.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Sunanda K. Datta Ray, *Looking East to Look West: Lee Kuan Yew's Mission India*, Gurgaon, Penguin Books, 2009, p.150.

<sup>26</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian in the Indo-Pacific*, Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012, p.90

low profile as an actor in the regional geopolitics of the East. In other words, India has failed to be a reputational power in the ASEAN region and beyond. The reason can best be traced in her wariness about China.

### *The China factor*

Singapore's founder-premier Lee Kuan Yew believed that India was the only possible Asian power with the potential to stabilize the (Southeast Asian) region against China and believed that it was not ASEAN but India who can see China in the eye.<sup>27</sup> Lee Kuan Yew's aspiration to project India against Chinese assertiveness presumably laid in the post-1962 China policy of India. The ignominious defeat against China ended Nehru's hope for compatibility with her via *Panchsheel* or NAM. Thus he declared, "*There is no non-alignment vis-à-vis China. There is no Panch Sheel vis-à-vis China.*"<sup>28</sup> This was the beginning of India's open hostility against China in the international field, especially in Southeast Asia where she was attempting to isolate the Asian giant. Thus, India's junior foreign minister Lakshmi Menon cautioned Southeast Asia, while visiting Thailand in 1963; "The Chinese problem is a common problem. One day it may be your problem in South-East Asia."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, China became a challenging factor in India's East Asia policy since 1962. Later in 1969, Mrs. Indira Gandhi termed Chinese belief in theory of spheres of influence as a dangerous phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> This Chinese conviction to theory of spheres of influence proved to be genuine following China's assertiveness against Vietnam in Cambodia (1979) and especially in the South China Sea in the 1990s and the latest Belt and Road Initiative introduced in 2013. It is well known that China occupies a major part of India's Act East strategy. The Indian leadership considers rising China as security "challenge and a priority" and intends to cope with her.<sup>31</sup> In fact China has traditionally been a factor in India's East, especially Southeast, Asia policy, since 1947 which turned into a threat after 1962. The challenge has doubled with the rise of China in the new century.

C. Raja Mohan opines, "At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, China and India began to venture into the uncharted waters far from their own shores."<sup>32</sup> This is the result of the growing commercial network of both the neighbours in the vast Indo-Pacific region. But the serious lack of mutual trust following border dispute in South Asia has turned the two neighbours strategic rivals anywhere in the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. India's prime strategic concern in Southeast Asia has been to ensure that the region is not dominated by China. But, it is beyond India's present capacity to thwart such possibility from materializing. East Asia is a maritime battleground and India needs formidable navy to challenge China in her eastern backyard. India declared about naval modernization plan in 1990 but failed to embark on the mission due to financial crisis. It was not until the turn of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp.132, 160.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Asis Kumar Majumdar, *Southeast Asia in Indian Foreign Policy: A Study of India's Relations with South-East Asian Countries from 1962-82*, Calcutta, Naya Prokash, 1982, p.70, emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> Reported in *The Strait Times* (Singapore), 30 March, 1963, cited in ibid, p.72

<sup>30</sup> V. P. Dutt, *India's Foreign Policy*, p.259

<sup>31</sup> 'Finally Pranab calls China a challenge', *The Times of India*, Nov 5, 2008,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Finally-Pranab-calls-China-a-challenge/articleshow/3674466.cms> (accessed on 23.11.20).

<sup>32</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, p.49.

the new millennium with the rise in growth rates due to economic reforms that money was available for the modernization. Mission got extra impetus due to encouragement from the premier Vajpayee, his foreign minister Jaswant Singh, defence minister George Fernandes and his national security adviser Brajesh Mishra who were all inclined to expand India's maritime profile. The navy planned to have 160 ships by 2022 and three aircraft carrier groups by 2020.<sup>33</sup> However, the current naval strength of the two neighbours (as latest as in June 2020) leaves little room for sanguinity:

Particulars	INDIA	CHINA
Aircraft carriers	1	2
Submarines	16	74
Destroyers	10	36
Frigates	13	52
Corvettes	19	50
Mine Warfare	3	29
Coastal Patrol	139	220

Source: Business Insider

<https://www.businessinsider.in/defense/news/comparison-of-india-vs-china-defense-budget-army-air-force-and-navy-force/articleshow/76561443.cms>

Aircraft carrier is integral to any naval operations in the far off maritime zones. Unfortunately, the future of India's aspiration for 3 aircraft carrier groups currently looks dull after the Chief of Defence Staff (CoD) General Bipin Rawat as latest as in May 2020 opined against acquiring third aircraft carrier and said that the Navy needs more submarines rather than aircraft carriers iterating that, "We have to guard and fight only along our borders and, of course, dominate the Indian Ocean region."<sup>34</sup> Again the CoD clarified India's security priority zone. Besides, the navy is already complaining of decline in budget share.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, with this inadequate preparation and declining budget it is not possible for India to counter Chinese expansion in the Pacific. This is a major handicap of India's Act East strategy of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Apart from the physical strength, China's growing influence in South Asia is also pulling India back from blowing the bugle against her in the Pacific. In fact, India's main challenge from China lies in South Asia. Apart from securing her northern border from the Chinese nibbling, India has to secure northeastern part from the China-backed insurgents whom the Chinese use as bargaining tool to pressure New Delhi. There are intelligence reports which say that the insurgent groups from Assam, [Manipur](#), [Nagaland](#) and [Mizoram](#) maintain regular contact with Chinese intelligence agencies and have benefited from Chinese largesse and weapons. Large amounts of Chinese weapons are increasingly seized in the region impacting regional stability,

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, pp.58,59,61.

<sup>34</sup> *The Time of India*, May 10, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/forces-must-shun-imports-go-for-make-in-india-says-gen-bipin-rawat/articleshow/75652962.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>35</sup> 'Navy Chief Admiral Singh flags concern over decline in funds allocation to Navy', *The Economic Times*, Dec 3, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/navy-chief-admiral-singh-flags-concern-over-decline-in-funds-allocation-to-navy/articleshow/72350307.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 04.07.20).



according to the Home Ministry report.<sup>36</sup> Apart from this, India has to keep her smaller neighbours from turning to China who consider her as a major counterweight of India. India suspected Chinese hands behind recent territorial spat with Nepal claiming portion of Indian territory.<sup>37</sup> In this situation it is risky for India to provoke China in the Pacific. Thus, she hesitates supporting Taiwan's inclusion in the World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>38</sup> let alone her independence, as against Chinese refusal to consider Kashmir or Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory. Nor she is inclined to support military solution to South China Sea dispute<sup>39</sup> even when knowing of high possibility of eventual Chinese domination, if not countered, over the maritime zone which is immensely important to India's commercial interests. India is even hesitant to sell *BrahMos* missile to Vietnam, a major China-wary country of Southeast Asia.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Altering character of the Look East-turned-Act East Policy***

Therefore, India's Act East strategy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces several challenges from an already risen China. India cannot match her militarily (with a defence budget of meagre \$71.1 billion as against \$261 billion of China as in 2019, according to SIPRI<sup>41</sup>). India is handicapped due to military weakness and her South Asian, including Indian Ocean Region, compulsions. India cannot be considered a power to reckon with in the Pacific. However, the growing Chinese challenge needs to be countered. And this emergency is altering the character of the Look East-turned-Act East Policy. Rather than economy, the 'counter China' strategy is now guiding the Policy of India, especially after the Chinese shenanigan in the Galwan valley in June 2020 where China occupied portion of the disputed territory in Ladakh killing 20 Indian soldiers. This change is evident from India's refusal to join the recently formed largest economic bloc RCEP formed in November 2020 but taking interest in the US-sponsored QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) consisting of Japan and Australia (traditional US allies) which is a covert 'anti-China' defence alliance and even proposing *JAI* (Japan, America and India) alliance in 2018 underlining the 'democratic values' of the partner countries (as against authoritarian China) to progress free, open, conclusive and rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>42</sup> These are reminiscent of India's anti-China mission in the Pacific region in the 1960s when the then deputy premier

<sup>36</sup> 'More Chinese arms reach Northeast India', *Northeast Now*, November 20, 2020, <https://nenow.in/north-east-news/assam/more-chinese-arms-reach-northeast-india.html> (accessed on 24.11.20).

<sup>37</sup> *The Statesman* (Kolkata), 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2020, p.1

<sup>38</sup> US Supports Taiwan's World Health Assembly Status', VOA, March 30, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/coronavirus-outbreak/us-supports-taiwans-world-health-assembly-observer-status> (accessed on 29.07.20)

<sup>39</sup> 'Don't militarise South China Sea, says Rajnath', *The Hindu*, November 19, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/dont-militarise-south-china-sea-says-rajnath/article30013892.ece> (accessed on 29.07.20).

<sup>40</sup> Rahul Bedi, 'Four Years After Modi's Act East Promise, India is No Closer to Selling BrahMos to Vietnam', *The Wire*, July 2, 2020, <https://thewire.in/security/india-vietnam-brahmos-missile> (accessed on 24.11.20).

<sup>41</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, [https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion#:~:text=Global%20military%20expenditure%20sees%20largest%20annual%20increase%20in%20a%20decade,reach%20%241917%20billion%20in%202019&text=\(Stockholm%2C%2027%20April%202020\),Peace%20Research%20Institute%20\(SIPRI\)](https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion#:~:text=Global%20military%20expenditure%20sees%20largest%20annual%20increase%20in%20a%20decade,reach%20%241917%20billion%20in%202019&text=(Stockholm%2C%2027%20April%202020),Peace%20Research%20Institute%20(SIPRI)) (accessed on 24.11.20).

<sup>42</sup> *The Statesman* (Kolkata), 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2018, p.1

Morarji Desai proposed collaboration between democratic India, Japan and Australia to pressure China.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly, India's integration with the US-backed Indo-Pacific project, which China considers a confrontational rhetoric,<sup>44</sup> is also a shift from her traditional policy of keeping the big powers at bay in the regional affairs which were most evident during Nehru and Indira Gandhi's time. Presumably this shift is due to India's realization of her incapacity to contain the formidable strategic rival China threatening India's interests in the East. That India's Act East Policy has become integral to the wide Indo-Pacific notion was clear from her foreign minister S. Jayshankar's reference to ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook justifying the 'growing recognition of the logic of the Indo-Pacific' and even emphasizing that Indo-Pacific is a 'contemporary description of the current reality.'<sup>45</sup> Therefore, India is opting for a direct alliance with the major Pacific power USA and her allied powers, Japan and Australia, whose relations with China are no less tensed. Foreign minister's reference to the recent decision of Germany, France and the Netherlands subscribing to the Indo-Pacific project underlines India's inclination to expand this circle of the China-wary countries.<sup>46</sup>

However, QUAD (termed as 'Asian NATO' in China,<sup>47</sup>) is ineffective given internal differences and difficulties. Unlike USA, other participants do not want to take an aggressive anti-China stand. India was indecisive about extending invitation to Australia to this year's *Malabar* naval exercise (conducted with USA and Japan), but finally did.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes, even Australia chose to be out of the exercise, as she did in 2008 under Chinese pressure, which later Canberra acknowledged as a mistake.<sup>49</sup> Yet, it is difficult for Canberra to antagonise China too much since China is a major market of Australian iron ore and coal. On the other hand, the Chinese foreign minister visited Japan in November 2020 and Japan called for stable relations with Beijing.<sup>50</sup> China is the largest trading partner of Australia and second largest of Japan.

## Conclusion

Stephen Cohen termed India as 'the weakest of the great states'<sup>51</sup> while George Tanham opined that Delhi's strategic community places the Indian subcontinent in the first

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<sup>43</sup> Reported by *The Hindu*, August 23, 1967, p.1, cited in Subhadeep Bhattacharya, *Looking East Since 1947: India's Southeast Asia Policy*, New Delhi, KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2016, p.66

<sup>44</sup> 'The World is bright as long as Asia Pacific is constructive', Editorial, *Global Times*, 21 November 20, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1207533.shtml>

<sup>45</sup> *The Statesman* (Kolkata), 21<sup>st</sup> November, 20, p.5

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Zhang Jiadong, 'QUAD desires 'Asian NATO', but China has smarter solutions', *Global Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1203120.shtml> (accessed on 26.11.20).

<sup>48</sup> Nayanima Basu and Amrita Nayak Dutta, 'India yet to formally invite Australia to join Malabar naval exercise along with USA and Japan', *The Print*, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2020, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/india-yet-to-formally-invite-australia-for-malabar-naval-exercise-with-us-japan/497105/> (accessed on 26.11.20).

<sup>49</sup> *The Hindu*, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/a-mistake-to-have-walked-out-of-quad-malabar-exercise-in-2008-australian-envoy-barry-ofarrell/article32931294.ece> (accessed on 26.11.20).

<sup>50</sup> *The Asahi Shimbun*, November 25, 2020, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13962941> (accessed on 26.11.20).

<sup>51</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *Emerging Power*, p.35.



circle (of priority) and regard security in terms of strategic unity of the subcontinent.<sup>52</sup> India's changing Look East-turned-Act East strategy endorses both the opinions. India's weakness visible in her approach to the East is due to her security and strategic compulsion to the subcontinent. India's prime strategic challenge remains in South Asia which she has to handle single-handedly as was evident during the latest Galwan crisis. Land-oriented security priority absorbs maximum of India's physical strength demanding investment in the land forces at the cost of the navy. Thus, India has little scope to play any decisive role in the East militarily. And opting out of the RCEP has reduced the scope even further, both diplomatically and economically. As Chinese 'threat' will rise in the Pacific, so will be the demand for assertive actions from the China-wary of the East leaving little room for India to contribute.

But India has to compete with China anywhere in the world for the security of her national interest. Thus, India is pursuing an alliance policy, contrary to her traditional NAM principle, in the Pacific with major powers like USA, Japan and Australia. At the same time she is developing bilateral relations with small China-wary countries of ASEAN region like Vietnam and the Philippines.<sup>53</sup> India's Act East strategy seems to integrate more with the grand Indo-Pacific strategic design to contain China's rise relegating economic priorities to the second position- evident in opting out of RCEP but promoting *JAI*. India's current Act East strategy can be explained in terms of Kenneth Waltz's 'balance of threat' theory, a variant of defensive realist approach, which suggests that 'in anarchy, states form alliances to protect themselves.'<sup>54</sup> Yet, the differences within QUAD and India's own hesitance in provoking China are the main impediments to the success of her current Act East strategy.

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<sup>52</sup> George Tanham, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay*, National Defense Research Institute, Rand Corporation, Issue 4207, 1992, pp.23, 24.

<sup>53</sup> In November 2020 India and the Philippines vowed to strengthen defence engagement which is seen coming in the backdrop of China's growing expansionist behaviour in eastern Ladakh (Galwan valley), South China Sea and Indo-Pacific region. *The Economic Times*, November 6, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-philippines-vow-to-strengthen-defence-engagement-maritime-cooperation/articleshow/79084332.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 24.11.20).

<sup>54</sup> Colin Elman, 'Realism', in Martin Griffiths (ed), *International Relations Theory in the Twenty-first Century: An Introduction*, London, New York, Routledge, 2007, p.17.

# Exception as the ‘new’ normal: Experiences during pandemic in India

Madhurilata Basu\*

“How clear everything becomes when you look from the darkness of a dungeon!”

— Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988)

The beginning of this year (2020) gave humans an experience hitherto unprecedented: For all of us, much of our lives was/is *on hold*. We knew we could die, but the ‘uncertainty’ about who could and when, had never loomed so large on us. We were in darkness. In a word, Coronavirus has turned our body and society into uncertain spaces, which in turn has, led to a new kingdom of bio-politics to its extreme. What was previously known as ‘exception’, has now become ‘normal’ or the so-called ‘new’ normal! In this limited space, let us take a stock of some of the effects since the outbreak of Coronavirus and the governmental mechanism to cope with/contain the challenge, which in effect has allowed the (medical) knowledge/(governmental) power combine to redesign the lives of the ‘ruled’, especially in India.

On March 11, 2020, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in a press conference in Geneva, for the first time declared COVID 19 outbreak to be a pandemic. He further added, ‘Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death’.<sup>1</sup> Thus, emerged a crisis, that Ranabir Samaddar had identified to be an amalgamation of several crises.(during a roundtable discussion, held during the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Research and orientation Workshop and Conference, on 21 November 2020, Kolkata<sup>2</sup>).

## ***Events leading to the Lockdown:***

The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China (on December 31 2019), reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province, which was later on identified as novel coronavirus or COVID 19. In January 2020, China had shared the genetic sequence of COVID 19 and first case was confirmed outside China, in Thailand. Finally, on March 11 2020, based on the spread and severity of the virus, the World Health Organization declared it to be a pandemic<sup>3</sup>. The first case to be reported in India was on January 30 and on February 12, Rahul Gandhi of Indian National Congress, had tweeted, ‘The Corona Virus is an extremely serious threat to our people and our economy. My sense is the government is not taking this threat seriously. Timely action is critical’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbT6AANFom4>. Last accessed 12.11.20.

<sup>2</sup> The above idea was shared during a roundtable discussion, held during the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Research and orientation Workshop and Conference, on 21 November 2020, Kolkata.

<sup>3</sup> For details see <https://www.who.int/>. Last accessed 16.11.2020.

<sup>4</sup> For details see <https://twitter.com/rahulgandhi/status>. Last accessed 16.11.2020.

India was not careful enough when the first cases surfaced in Kerala earlier this year, hence screening of international passengers were not initiated till March 6 and Indian government maintained that COVID 19 was not a health emergency till March 13. On March 19 2020, while addressing the nation (through a live telecast), Narendra Modi had urged all Indians to follow the norms of social distancing and also declared that a one-day *Janata* curfew was going to be imposed. Indians were also encouraged to go to the terrace or to the balconies at 5 PM on March 22 (Sunday) and clap and bang on their utensils or whatever they have, for five minutes, as a gesture to thank for the selfless services of the medical professionals, essential services providers, and other frontline workers during the pandemic (*The Hindu*, March 19, 2020).

Prime Minister's words, *Hum svasth, jag svasth* (if we are healthy, so will the world be), like a good advertisement slogan charmed many but did little in the fight against the virus. His *Janata* curfew and *thali bajao* (banging utensils) programme was successful among the urban Indians, though many went overboard and social distancing norms were flouted. Perhaps, Modi was preparing the ground for his long term, nation-wide lockdown announcement, trying to discipline them through programmes of *Janata* curfew and *thali bajao* and in effect testing the obedience among his countrymen. While in several places in Europe, people went to balconies to cheer for care providers during the pandemic, sang together to beat despair while in isolation, they did it spontaneously, without being asked unilaterally to do so.

### ***Lockdown and its Aftermath:***

Even before the lockdown, the situation was grim when it came to Indian economy. International Monetary Fund revealed that from 2015 to 2019, growth rates had turned half (from 8% to 4%) (IMF 2020), by 2018 unemployment rate was over 6% and unemployment rate for the youth was as high as 23% (ILO 2020). When a country-wide lockdown was announced on March 24 2020, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with a four-hours' notice, the uncertainties in the lives of the poor, marginalised sections, migrant workers increased manifold. The blanket lockdown implied closing of state borders, schools, colleges, withdrawal of train and bus services which led to disruption in the supply of essential goods, leading to inflation and fear of shortages. In a survey on migrant workers, it was revealed that as of April 14, 89% respondents in Maharashtra had ration for two days, in Karnataka 36% respondents had ration for one day. On an average 50% of workers had ration left for just a day, while 96% had not received any ration from the government and 70% did not receive any cooked food either. The picture from Uttar Pradesh was grave where it was reported that none of the migrant respondents (migrant labour stuck in UP) received any ration from the government (SWAN 2020). The pandemic crisis brought to the fore lot of pressing issues, that warrants questioning the ones in power and demands lot of open debates and discussions.

### ***The prevalence of threat perspective and the use of war rhetoric:***

Worldwide outbreak of diseases, including the current COVID 19 outbreaks, are now perceived as 'non-traditional' security threats to States and to International order (United Nations

2004; Hameiri and Jones 2015). The west African Ebola outbreak of 2013 to 15 witnessed the deployment of International militaries from China, Canada, France, Germany, UK, USA, among others in the global health security response. Their involvement varied from building Ebola treatment centres, training of health workers, helping with quarantine and being involved in other activities. In order to deal with Zika virus Brazil government used war rhetoric and the military was seen to be assigned important roles like fumigation projects health education and other activities (Wenham 2019, 1101). Though health security has been a key factor in all of these cases, however, it is pertinent to mention that there is no simple, single definition of health security. From prevention and control of infectious diseases to focussing on universal health coverage, it can mean anything (Horton and Das 2015). There have also been studies which had showed that dearth of access to healthcare is a serious challenge for achieving individual health security (Heymann et al 2015, 1884). The very idea of access or the absence of it had worsened the post-lockdown phase in India for the poor, marginalized, handicapped sections after the outbreak of COVID 19 virus.

During COVID 19 outbreak Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also used war rhetoric, comparing Corona to a *jung* or war and referred to health workers and other essential service providers as Corona Warriors, thus, directly linking spread of a disease to a security threat. 'The battle of Mahabharata was won in 18 days, whereas the battle of the coronavirus would be won in 21 days', he said (Chenoy 2020). Using a militaristic analogy, Brazilian President Bolsonaro equated COVID 19 pandemic to an "invisible enemy", while Ugandan President Kaguta Museveni, comparing pandemic to a war, urged citizens to give up freedom and not complain of hunger. Again, the naming of COVID 19 vaccine as Sputnik, by Russian government, brought to the fore, the notion of masculine nationalism which depends on militarism (Ibid). Populist leaders used war rhetoric, to target their perceived 'other', close down borders, expand their control. As a result, members of Tableegh-e-Jamat were targeted as the carriers or spreaders of virus in India or Brazil sealed borders with Venezuela or the current regime in Uganda, initiated containment measures, restricting political gatherings, which is being feared, might affect 2021 Presidential elections (Tallio 2020).

The above threat perception also led migrant workers, walking back home (as no other means were available) through highways or other city spaces, be treated as carriers of COVID19 virus. The city spaces were mostly perceived by city dwellers to be sanitized spaces which needed protection from the "other"—the migrants. Thus, to defend various communities, be it in cities, towns, villages, vigilantes came out protecting the 'inner perimeter of the community— a slum settlement, a city ward, a village, a clan, a kin network, or the nation' (Samaddar 2020, 7).

### ***Food Scarcity and Cash Crunch:***

Food or the unavailability of it was at the centre of the debate that got unravelled during lockdown. Some migrant workers stranded in Bangaluru, managed to get meals from *Indira* Canteens (Karnataka's take on *Amma* canteens of Tamil Nadu), but the demand was so high, that they were running out of food, which meant urban poor, migrant workers going without food even after standing for hours in the que. Though initially, state government was distributing free food through the canteens, but the scheme was later cancelled citing the issue of 'misuse'. If all

these were not enough, the vulnerable migrant workers across India, in their helpless efforts to return home, faced with deplorable actions (*Firstpost* June23, 2020). During lockdown, when a large section of the urban poor, handicapped, migrant labourers were yet to receive aid or ration through the public, distribution system, *Indira* and *Amma* canteens helped feed a huge number of people, even when they could not feed another huge section due to paucity of resources. In Tamil Nadu, various organisations had distributed free food through Amma canteens. It was noted that during lockdown, around ten states have run community canteens, and the Indira canteens and Amma canteens were successful in reviving their customer base. When all eateries were closed down and rations did not yet arrive, many relied on these low-priced food joints, which also successfully employed women from the self-help groups. However, their reliance on continuous government support for their sustenance, limited the availability of resources, whereby though many could be fed, many were turned away (*The Hindu* July 21, 2020).

Even years after the implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013, all the beneficiaries did not receive their cards caste structure, unequal gender relations (both within a caste and outside it), socio-economic realities, lead to inequality which in turn leads to skewed power balance which greatly affects the bargaining processes, of those seeking or trying to access their entitlements (Pradhan and Roy 2019, 14). On March 26, 2020, Finance Minister of India, Nirmala Sitharaman declared free distribution of food grains and the payment of cash to be made in favour of women, poor senior citizens and others through Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojna. Though the government maintained that food grains were distributed across the country in several households, various news reports and reports from various other organizations, set up by citizens pointed out that despite the claim, a huge section of the population were yet to receive food grains. The ration cards under the Indian public distribution system (PDS henceforth) enables residents of a particular area to have access to the benefits of PDS, implying that it was unable to serve a mobile migrant population. Further, according to a survey, 14% of the respondents (mostly migrant labourers) did not have ration cards and 94% of the workers did not have the Building and Other Construction Workers identity card, because of which they could not have any access to benefits that were announced by the government through the BOCW fund (Jan Sahas, 2020, 1). Again, the discrepancy that exists in terms of what is allotted by governments and what is delivered on the ground, made it more difficult of the poor, disadvantaged to have access to entitlements. For instance, in Domkal, Murshidabad (West Bengal) it was reported that 400 families had obstructed the highway in protest after being not provided with necessary amount of food grains through the PDS system (*Scroll.in* April 15,2020).

The Stranded Workers Action Network report had revealed that due to lockdown, workers in India's informal sector, casual workers, migrant workers had either lost their jobs or had not received their last payments. In such a situation, they were left with meagre amount of money. Various experts, opposition leaders, Chief Ministers like Amrinder Singh, Mamata Banerjee and others and other civil society organizations demanded cash transfer to these people. Activists like Aruna Roy, Harsh Mander, Kavita Krishnan or economists like Jean Dreze, and Jayati Ghosh many and others, as early as in March, in a letter to the government had urged for the release of a one-time emergency relief package for the 'informal labour force, agricultural workers, small and marginal farmers, MGNREGA workers, old-age pensioners, widows, the differently-abled, slum dwellers, the homeless and other such vulnerable communities' (*Outlook*

March 24 2020). World-wide, the number of people to live extreme poverty would rise by a 40-60 million by the end of this year and 55% of whom do not have any kind of social protection (ILO and UNICEF 2020,7).

Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee commenting on as to how to deal the post-lockdown economic crisis in India stated that instead of government packages meant specifically to target micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), it would be better to facilitate cash transfer, which would in effect, increase the spending power of people. In a bustee settlement on Mall Road Dum Dum, Kolkata, several residents argued in favour of cash transfer. Highlighting the impossibility of exchanging food grains for medicines, children's tuition fees, or buying other necessary items, cash transfer from both governments were deemed necessary in order to live in dignity.<sup>5</sup> Further, cyclone Amphan made things worse in West Bengal, affecting agriculture, houses, storages of food grains, communication and so on.

### ***Violence and Discrimination:***

Another problem that the country faced during the lockdown was the threat of self-appointed vigilantes. On March 27 2020, member of Parliament, Shashi Tharoor posted a letter addressed to Narendra Modi, on Twitter urging to take necessary steps to curb rise of vigilantism in different parts of the country and also requesting police to not resort to violent means while dealing with lockdown violators. Reuters, a day before had also uploaded a video in Twitter, showing police resorting to violence. Images of distressed migrants, walking their way back home, were made to crawl in heat in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, will be etched in our memory for a long time. As per data collected till July 4 2020, 12 people had died due to police brutality, lathi charge or state violence and 18 were reported to be killed because of non-communal crimes during lockdown (thejeshgn.com 2020). In places, the returnee migrants faced stigma leading to discrimination against their families, which in effect led to their isolation. Through this act of protecting one's community, race became once again relevant, however, not entirely uniting but creating an "us" and "them".

Everyday violence and abuse that women in private spaces, households experience, not only in India but the world over, increased manifold during the lockdown. Most of women who face violence cannot access institutional help or find it difficult to acknowledge (International Centre for Research on Women 1999, 3). In the April newsletter of the National Women's Commission, a new WhatsApp emergency number was launched along with other online and offline modes of lodging complaints. Being confined with abusers during lockdown, increased chances of abuse. While in March the number of complaints lodged was 1347, with all the complaints being resolved, in April the number, stood at 2028 (including online, offline and WhatsApp complaints), while only 730 could be resolved. The highest number of complaints was recorded in July, with 2365 complaints lodged through various means within India, with only 1193 cases being resolved (ncw.nic.in/newsletters). Till the second week of May, seventy cases of domestic violence were registered with Women's Commission in West Bengal (*The Print* May 11, 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> Based on authour's interaction with residents, held on 5.6.2020.

Violence and discrimination against caregivers and people from India's north-east had also increased manifold during lockdown. Communities drew and re-drew boundaries and the perceived 'other' was certainly not welcome. A Manipuri nurse never felt unwelcomed in south Kolkata area, where she resided with her friends. However, the outbreak of the "China virus" as dubbed by American President Donald Trump, changed everything. The shopkeeper whom she addressed as uncle, refused selling her any item from his shop and held her responsible for spreading the disease.<sup>6</sup> Meiyang Chang, and Indian Idol contestant appealed online, 'My Name is Chang and I'm Not Coronavirus', after he experienced racism in Mumbai (news18.com April 9, 2020). BBC on April 2, posted a video on Twitter, where health workers were seen being attacked by a mob, when they went to inspect suspected COVID patients. Various reports surfaced stating that health workers were not let inside their rented homes or housing complexes across India or worst were evicted (*The Guardian* May 2, 2020).

### ***The poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized and the case of migrant labour:***

Though the nation-wide lockdown was aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus, the sudden announcement had triggered a humanitarian crisis for which the governments both at the center and the states were not prepared for. Researches done during this pandemic reveal that COVID 19 negatively impacted the SCs, STs, OBCs, Dalits, and women and the impact was considerably less for upper caste persons (Kesar et al 2020; Deshpande and Ramachandran 2020). Though loss of income and unemployment has been a reality across categories, however, women in general, reported more loss of jobs when compared to men. Again, research revealed that Muslims were at higher risk of losing jobs than Hindus – 84% against 66% (Kesar et.al 2020). An article noted the emergence of a "new class of poor", based on surveys conducted in slums across twelve cities, whereby 95.3% reported loss of their main source of income and the hardest hit, according to the article, were BPL (Below Poverty line) households where 91 % respondents reported job loss (Das Gupta 2020). Further, the death of JamloMakdam, who walked 110 kms from Telengana to her village in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district (*India Today* April 21, 2020) reveals the brutal truth of the persistence of child labour and there is this lurking fear that things would only get worse during the pandemic.

Answering to an unstarred question (no.174), asked by Shri K Navaskani, Shri Balubhau Alias Suresh Narayan Dhanorkar and Adv. Adoor Prakash, regarding the data available with the government about migrant deaths while returning to their home and if any compensation would be provided by the government, the Minister of Labour and Employment, Government of India categorically stated, 'No such data is maintained' and for the next one replied, 'Question does not arise in view of above'. The minister, while giving out detailed data of migrant workers returning to their home states disclosed that as of September, the states receiving highest number of returnee migrants were Uttar Pradesh(32,49,638), followed by Bihar (15,00,612) and West Bengal 13,84,693. No data was available for Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Chandigarh,

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<sup>6</sup> Based on personal correspondence (25.3.20).

Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Mizoram and Karnataka. Ladakh had the lowest number of migrant workers, returning home (50).<sup>7</sup>

Though the state had no data on migrant deaths, but there reports of death due to starvation, exhaustion, walking in the heat. 47 people as of July 4, died out of heat and exhaustion. 76 died as they did not get access to timely care or was untreated or did not receive due medical attention. 209 people, including women and children had died during their attempts to reach home. They died in road accidents, some were hit by train, some fell off rail bridges, some drowned, the list goes on. There were several instances where migrant workers committed suicide in quarantine centers (thejeshgn.com 2020). Prashant Kishore on March 30, posted a video featuring migrant workers being bundled up and put behind collapsible gates. They were occupying a really small place in Siwan, near Bihar-Uttar Pradesh border. The norm of physical distancing was clearly flouted by the administration on this occasion. With regard to the aforementioned question, the minister had stated that the Indian Railway has operated more than 4611 Shramik Special Trains for convenience of the workers, whereby more than 63.07 lakh migrant workers could reach home free of cost with food and water being provided, is a claim, that got busted several times. An account shared by Nandita Haksar on the ordeal that was faced by people from India's north-east stuck in Goa, who had to travel via train to their respective states and her and a few good Samaritans who stepped in to help, being just one such example (*Scroll.in* May 27, 2020).

### ***Education and Health:***

Due to pandemic 27 crore children in India have been affected by the closure of schools (Vyas 2020, 3), which has necessitated online mode of teaching and learning and in a country like India which tops the list when it comes to gender gap in accessing technology, girl students studies found out, would be more affected (*Foreign Policy* July 23, 2020), some might also be forced out of school and have to start working in order to sustain their families, as during financial crisis, families deploy every possible means to survive and making a child work, in exchange of a payment is just one such strategy. Thus, child labour in informal sector would increase since children can 'step in as unskilled labourers', charging even less in post-crisis situations (ILO and UNICEF 2020, 11). Further, 85% students in rural India, would not be able to avail the benefits of online teaching as they would not have access to internet and the figure would be worse in case of the poorer, marginalized social groups such as Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims (Ibid 10). In case of the world, it was estimated that an additional 24 million children, might drop out which would worsen pre-existing education disparities (UN 2020, 2). In case of India, out- of- school children will double and the ones to be worst affected are Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims (Seethalakshmi, 2020).

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<sup>7</sup>For more details, visit <http://loksabhapn.nic.in/>. Last accessed 14.11.2020. Also see, "Point no. xxvi Regarding relief measures for victims of COVID -19 Pandemic", Seventeenth Series, Vol. IX, Fourth Session, 2020/1942 (Saka) No. 01, Monday, September 14, 2020/Bhadrapada 23, 1942 (Saka), p 743.

<sup>7</sup>i See, Giorgio Agamben on coronavirus: "The enemy is not outside, it is within us", at <https://bookhaven.stanford.edu/2020/03/giorgio-agamben-on-coronavirus-the-enemy-is-not-outside-it-is-within-us/>. Last accessed 21.11.20.



The government schools in India are not only sites for learning but they are also a means to access cooked food in the form of mid-day meals. Realizing this, Supreme Court had directed states to ensure supply of mid-day meals across India(*The Economic Times* April 19, 2020). The crucial role played by Anganwadi workers and accredited social health activists, commonly known as ASHA workers, working in the frontlines, providing nutrition and basic healthcare to a large section in rural areas in India, during the COVID 19 pandemic, should be acknowledged. In West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh raw materials were set to students' homes, Assam, Karnataka and Jammu and Kashmir along with others had felt the necessity to send home mid-day meals for students during lockdown. In West Bengal and Karnataka, Anganwadi workers provided the necessary service (The Print March 26,2020).

Further, the primary health centres could resume functioning to a lot extent, due to the efforts of the ASHA workers or ASHA *didis* as they are popularly known. However, during pandemic, pregnant women were urged to have deliveries in private nursing homes with which government hospital doctors are associated. In such cases these women care workers who get incentives based on every institutional delivery, they suffered (*The Wire* October 15, 2020). In rural areas, ASHA workers have been screening people, returnees to a village, going door to door in order to check for COVID 19 patients among those who have fallen sick, making the rural population aware of the need to wash hands, wear masks, maintain physical distancing, and quarantining people if and when required.

According a report, till March 31, 2015, more than 8% of 25,300 PHCs, had no doctors, 38% had no laboratory technicians and 22% had no pharmacists. A huge number of seats for both male and female health assistants also remained vacant. In case of Community health centers there was a dearth of specialists like gynaecologists and paediatrician (Sharma 2015, 2381). In a country like India which is already characterised by lack of infrastructure, dearth of manpower, this pandemic had provided an opportunity to think outside the box, to reimagine our healthcare system, however, all that could have been achieved is the adoption of a stop gap mechanism to deal with the virus, with the vaccine being already treated as an electoral bait.

### ***Towards the “new” normal***

Home had become the new work space for a lot of people bringing into life time-space compression (Harvey 1989). The same modus operandi, adopted across the globe in dealing with the COVID 19 virus, the rising death figures, the socio-economic crisis that's been triggered by it, also leads to such a feeling, where distinctness often collapses. The new normal saw the limiting of democratic spaces, it saw inaccessibility of internet, pushing young minds into taking extreme steps, it saw denial of the state to give fellowships to students, who again, were forced to take their own lives. The new normal made us react acknowledge the hierarchical nature of citizenry that exists in India- one being brought home through government's Vande Bharat Mission programme, and the other that was forced to walk home, endure heat, humiliation, lathi charge.

But is there any light at the end of the tunnel? Giorgio Agamben, the Italian thinker is not so sure. He stated that the present and the future is “worrisome”. He further added, “Just as wars have left as a legacy to peace a series of inauspicious technology, from barbed wire to nuclear power plants, so it is also very likely that one will seek to continue even after the health

emergency experiments that governments did not manage to bring to reality before: closing universities and schools and doing lessons only online, putting a stop once and for all to meeting together and speaking for political or cultural reasons and exchanging only digital messages with each other, wherever possible substituting machines for every contact — every contagion — between human beings.”<sup>8</sup> He might sound pessimistic but as critical citizens do we see much hope or the dark dungeons, where we are now, have revealed the world in a new light?

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# Urbanisation and Migration: A Case of Reverse Migration Amidst Pandemic

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## Introduction

Urbanization is a process of transformation of society including some socio-economic development. It is a process that virtually all countries have experienced in a more minuscule part or more sizably voluminous part. One society commences being urbanized while it transfers from an agricultural society to an industrial society. Urbanization is proximately cognate to the process of modernization. As many populations start incrementing in one place, the development withal occurs in that particular area. It is verbally expressed that urbanization is an indispensable condition of economic development of society because, through economic development, urban areas get their lifestyle, developed environment than the rural areas, and more facilities for the people. Elements of urban magnification can be relegated into three categories- Natural increase which is the result of the higher birth rate than the death rate, migration i.e. peregrinating from one place to another, and reclassification which is the result of enlarging the size of urban areas. Their contribution differs in urban magnification, according to the demographic changes and situations. The 21st century witnessed remarkable urbanization in all components of the world. According to the World Health Organization Report (2015)- fifty-four percent of the world population lived in urban areas in 2015. It has been expected that the urban population will increment immensely from fifty-four to sixty percent in 2030 and sixty-six percent in 2050, which will engender more challenges in urban areas (WHO Report, 2015).

## Migration and Urbanization: A Theoretical Perspective

The inception of this line of literature can be traced back 150 years when philomaths first identified and examined the migration-urbanisation issue in the Western context. Early literature attributes urbanization in Western countries to a prosperous industrialization process (Ravenstein, 1885). The first theory of migration and urbanization in developing countries can be traced to the dual economy model (Lewis, 1954), elongated by (Jorgenson, 1967). The well-attributed model postulates that two sectors- a classical rural sector and a modern urban industrial sector- subsist in an economy across the globe. Economics of the rural areas at the very beginning reflect a particular context in which there is surplus labour in the rural sector. It can supply an impeccably elastic labour force to the modern industrial sector. Central to the model is the postulation of output gains associated with resource transfers from rural low productivity sectors to urban high productivity sectors (He, 2012). In the short term, this leads to the reallocation of the labour force through migration from low population density rural areas to high

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population density urban areas. Such resource transfers and labour migration result in conspicuous spatial agglomeration of population, or urbanization (He, 2012).

There are mainly two types of migration- 1) Internal migration; when people peregrinate to different states or territory within the country for work or any other purport. 2) International migration; when people peregrinate to different countries. International migrations can be relegated as legal immigrants, Illegal immigrants, and refugees. According to the World Migration Report, 2020- the estimated number of international migrants is 272 million where 52 percent of international migrants are male and 48 percent of migrants are female (International Organisation for Migration, 2020). India is the most immensely colossal country in the world of inchoation of international migrants with 17.5 million followed by Mexico (11.8 million) and China (10.7 million) respectively (International Organisation for Migration, 2020). Variants of migration play a different role in the urbanization process. In developed countries, international migration plays an efficacious role in the urbanization process and for its diversity while in developing countries it is more often internal migration or rural to urban migration.

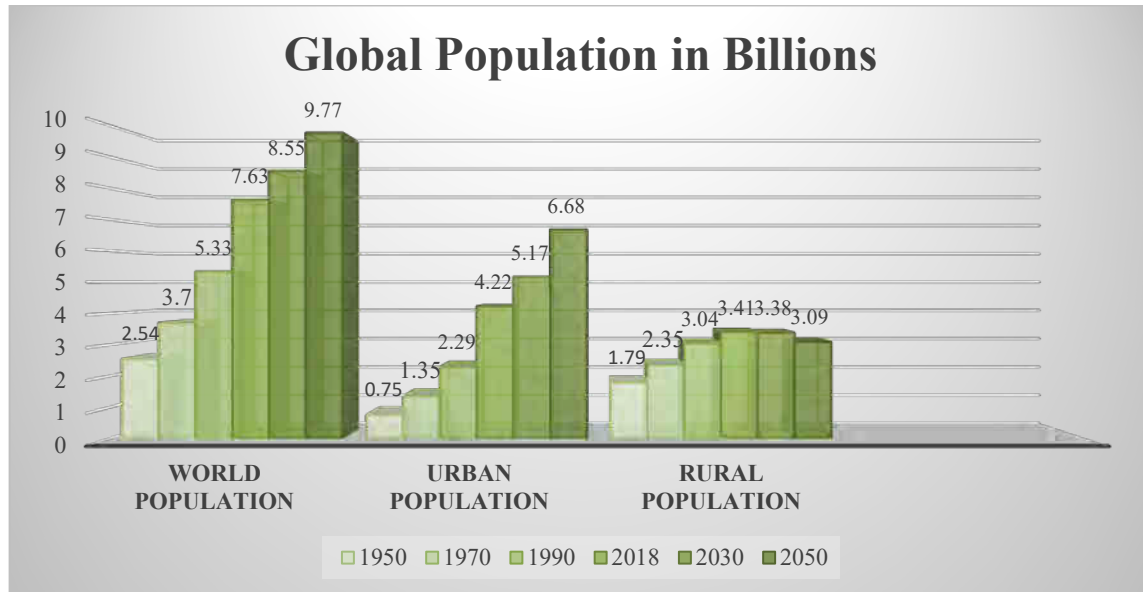
In the current global scenario, enormous extension and development of urban areas have been taken place due to migration and population magnification. Many countries have experienced significant changes in terms of the size of their population due to internal and international migration.

The massive number of sudden population magnification withal engenders lots of challenges for the place and regimes such as the organization of place, utilization of resources in a constrained way, to maintain its environment and ecosystem, etc. Rural-urban migration is always considered as the major factor for growing slums in urban areas. Cities are always getting predilection first for the transmute which offers multiple opportunities to the people. The trend of magnification of rural-urban migration is the result of the growing urbanization process, developed the authoritative ordinance for laborers and the rate of their wages compared to a rural area. Mostly adolescent generations are more liable to shift to the urban areas for better opportunities and withal city life magnetizes them so facilely.

### **Urban Population in Different Regions**

The process of organisation is accepted as a social, economic and territorial process. In recent decades, the world population has not been increased only but also urbanised rapidly. Between 1915 to 2018, the urban population of the grew in huge numbers due to the migration from different areas. But in the rural population, we do not see a huge change, unlike urban areas. United Nations report expected that the number of the rural population will start decreasing by 2030 and urban population has already overcome the rural population. Table1 shows a clear picture of the same.

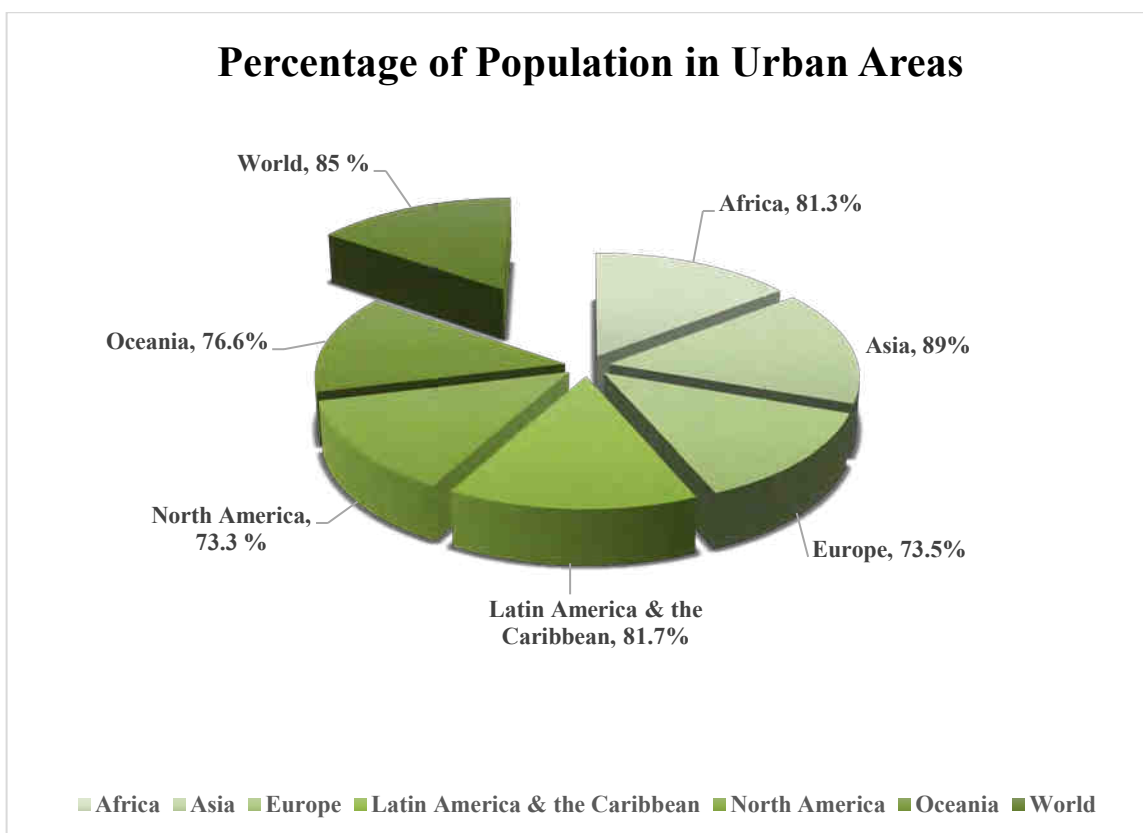
**Table 1-Global Population and Its Division in Different Years**



Source: UN World Urbanisation Prospects, 2019

The speed of urbanisation differs in the countries. Urbanisation process requires some measures and condition with proper planning to handle the challenges and mainly to reduce the negative impact on the environment and for sustainable development. Though every state has a different proportion of development, underdeveloped countries are mostly affected due to the result of the urbanisation process with the scarcity of natural resources. Migration to urban places has been increased in the late 20th century, therefore, the sudden changes in urban places made an alarming picture in the present scenario. Presently, more half of the world population lives in urban places in all regions. The urban population of the less developed regions has been growing considerably faster than that of the more developed regions (UN, 2019). Table 2 shows the diversity of the urban population (in percentage) in different regions in the world.

**Table 2: Growth of Urban Population in Different Region in the World (Percentage of Population)**



Source: European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), 2019

**Methodology:** In this study, data has been collected from secondary sources. Secondary data from books, journals, newspapers, magazines, internet survey, institutional and official documents are being collected in addition to government publications.

### Urban Migration, Socio-Economic Impact, and Development

Population migration is one of the consequential factors to study about urbanization process and its development. Rural-urban migration plays a consequential role in the urbanization process in different ways (Das & Sharma, 2018). Through migration, the urbanization process gets expedite and withal due to urbanization of an area, magnetizes for more migrated people to that place. Migration plays a paramount role in the urbanization process in different ways. Migration and Urbanisation are the reasons for the emergence of ecumenical cities which are interlinked with national and international markets (Kundu, 2007). It connects the different cultures of different areas with urban areas. People become more active in economic development in urban places. Through migration, urban cities bring the materials, mazuma, and men to the urban place which avails on the urbanization processes. Migration increases the population to the urban areas which avail to develop the infrastructure, better conveyance,



commercial areas, school-colleges to develop human-resources, hospitals for better health facilities and other essentialities.

Industrialization takes place so expeditious which engender lots of work opportunities for youth generations. It additionally abstracts the gap between business people. Migrant people who come in probing for jobs mundanely stay in a rental house which is the main cause for highly incrementing building in the city area and additionally incrementing the slums area in city side. The population magnification in urban places due to the migrations transmutes the pabulum habits of the people. It brings transmutations in the living environment. Urban migration became the agents of the development of science and technology and convivial transformation in the process of urbanization. Rural migrant customarily brings their own culture to the city areas and follow it but withal relish to adopt the city environment to adjust themselves.

Commuters additionally play a paramount role in the urbanization process. Commuters mundanely accommodate in urban areas without staying in urban cities. A minuscule seller, day laborers, students, traders, etc. are the examples of commuters (Das & Sharma, 2018). The growing conveyances from rural places avail them to connect with urban cities. Many of the people connect with cities through their circadian works and they accommodate in the city daily substratum and go back to their habitation in the night time. They additionally affect the policy-making system in urban areas. People emanate from minuscule towns withal commuting to the immensely colossal towns for better opportunities. Infrastructure development connects people with the villages which influencing to increment in the market of villagers in the urban cities. But peregrinators or tourists are not considered as commuters or migrants. In a city area, people can agonize the distinction between the daytime population and night-time population which is double in the daytime as they come to the city daily (Das & Sharma, 2018).

Through the development of a city, it can't verbally express that only a city gets affected many villagers get chances to work as a supplier from the village itself such as- milk, vegetables, fruits, flowers, handcrafted things, etc. which they can sell at a better price than they get in rural areas. Though there is no official survey for the commuters in urban cities, the commuters play a major role in the urbanization process. They avail to amend the economic condition of a city and provide different accommodations to make life facile for the people staying in the urban cities.

It is consequential to note that migration is not always a negative circumstance. It withal engenders many opportunities which are taken by the people to ameliorate their socio-economic condition for a better lifestyle. It engenders an instrument for economic development and overcomes impecuniosity. It has been pointed out that immensely colossal cities report a low caliber of impecuniosity and it has been additionally saying that these cities have lower facilities for the poor compared to more diminutive cities (UN, 2019). The emergence of globalization has led to the arousal call for convivial institutions like family and community. It made the whole world like a minuscule village because of which people are moving stoutheartedly and hesitant. Migration has availed to redistribute the population from rural to urban and developing to developed countries withal availed people in finding the survival path in different ways.

## **Reverse Migration amidst COVID-19 Pandemic**

Migration or moving of people from rural to an urban area is not an incipient phenomenon in search of better opportunities in life. However, under the incipient circumstances brought forth by the global pandemic world has witnessed unprecedented reverse migration in different components of the world. The regime of India implemented lockdown at a short notice of 4 hours. It is a *recherché* and unexpected phenomenon in democracy. All this was done without giving any forebodings to the general public (Kumar & Choudhury, 2020). Even in India, an immensely colossal number of workers, laborers, and students reverse migrated to their respective native places (Kumar & Choudhury, 2020). Due to the sudden lockdown migrated laborers faced lots of hardship in a different place to go back to their villages (Dandekar & Ghai, 2020). The implementation of lockdown as a quantification to bulwark the people from the pandemic hugely affected the inept and semi-adept laborers the most. Urban cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, etc. were worst hit due to the immensely colossal presence of migrated laborers especially from Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, and Odisha, etc. Migration always plays a consequential role in the livelihood strategies of the migrants (Choudhury, 2009). Living conditions in crowded places cause jeopardy in spreading COVID 19 among the migrant workers. Concurrently, in the times of COVID 19- employers and international migrants mostly lost their source of income. Due to the border closure and less economic capabilities, most of the migrants could not afford to come back to the country of their inception. In-country like Saudi Arabia and Singapore presented the official data on the migration status of COVID 19 positive. According to the Saudi Ministry of Health, 75 percent of incipient substantiated cases in May were among migrants only whereas 95 percent of incipient cases were in Singapore (International Organisation of Migration, 2020).

Different reports and studies have been found that the rural to urban migration cost the urban structure heavily with the economy, environment, and living conditions whereas reverse migration can avail in rural development through the adept human resource. Movement from rural to urban migration leads to an imbalance of resources of youth, edified, and adept people who are needed for rural development. Advocates of inversion migration argue that policymaker gives more paramount in the development of urban places than rural areas which can be abbreviated by giving concentration in rural areas as well. In the pandemic, the regime received an opportunity to make better agrarian policies by utilizing human resources (Inamdar & Thusoo, 2020). However, none of the regime of any countries was surely extemporary for these unexpected pandemic situations but the scenario of the condition of migrated workers of India in different components due to the lockdown raised the questions of everyone's mind that how much value regime gave for migrants' lives, precise data of how many migrants lost their jobs and lost their lives. The impact of the pandemic on domestic migrants of India was extreme and the poor and marginalised were the hardest hit (Kumar & Choudhury, 2020)

## Conclusion

Migration was a component of economic development that commenced in Europe from the mid-eighteenth century and spread to other components of the world (Sheldon, 2008). Presently, due to expeditious urbanization, most of the world's most expeditious-growing cities are located in Asia and Africa. In the case of India, Delhi is expected to overtake Tokyo, Japan as the world's most sizably voluminous city by 2030. According to the UN report (2018), by 2018 the number of cities with at least 1 million inhabitants had grown to 548 and in 2030, a projected 706 cities will have at least 1 million denizens. Migration sanctions bringing more capable laborers to the industrial and urban areas. The relationship between migration and urbanization submerged with cultural exchange, socio-economic, technological, and industrial development. In the present situation, the migration is engendering a plethora of challenges ecumenically because of which there is an exigent need to adopt measures and methods to decrement the negative effect on the urban areas by following sustainable development goals and environment auspice. When people peregrinate to a place for a better living condition for long period withal transmute the environment of the circumventions by utilizing the available resources. Congruous plans and policies of the regime will not only avail the migrants to move liberatingly and relish their rights but withal a systemic development with the congruous urban settlement of migrant people. Efficacious policies and work opportunities are an integral part of rural development. But in the pandemic times, it can be optically discerned that in India due to a lack of rural funds and efficacious livelihood opportunities, workers are returning to cities to make their lives like afore. It cannot gainsay that the regime has implemented different welfare schemes in India during lockdown such as- Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana (GKRY) for returning migrants. But most of the schemes which are for returning migrants were for a few months and it is about to culminate which withal caused of worry for the inversion migrants. The efficacy of welfare schemes withal depended on different factors. Flood is considered as one of the reasons for the states like Assam and Bihar where these schemes could not utilize opportunely for the migrant people. Besides, these schemes cannot give long term solutions to the inversion migrants unless and until their livelihood opportunities won't be improvised either in rural or urban areas. However, rural development withal should be taken into consideration in less developed countries so that rural people withal get incipient opportunities, and migration in astronomically immense numbers can be obviated. It was evident that the pandemic has dramatically intensified the plight of the vulnerable and oppressed, who lost access to essential services in the urban cities where they were providing services. (Roy, Sayantani et.al, 2020) In the pandemic situation, urban planners and policymakers have failed to take care of the well-being of migrant workers as part of the concerned city. The lockdown in India to prevent the spread of the virus has taken away the source of livelihood from migrant workers.

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