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IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON INDIAN FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Abstract

COVID-19 impacted multiple arenas of individual and community life especially on the aspects of health, economy and psychology. It has potentially stimulated the future India as its impact swayed across geographies and various strata. Among the largely affected nations, India confronted the crisis through multiple measures and strategies by various stakeholders. Instead of being a collaborative structure during such a crisis, it has given a tough challenge on many fronts. Based on various sociological studies, reports and observations of this crisis situation, the paper articulates on pandemic impact in India in general, family and community in particular.

Keywords: *Digital Divide, Infection, Lockdown, Migration,*

Introduction

The global pandemic in the form of COVID-19 crisis has come up with the extensive challenges and unfathomable implications. It has hit various dynamics of society which makes it important for social scientists to make an analysis of the crisis. It is the mandate of social science research to identify the problem, realize the problem and then go for sensitization of the problem which ultimately leads to some problem solving mechanism. This is best done through a multi-disciplinary approach because the problem today is not limited to the arena of health but social, political, economic, geographical, technological, psychological and cultural aspects of society. Considering the virus of foreign origin and its worldwide spread, concepts like globalization, international and national migration became prominent in the analysis. According to World Migration Report 2020 (p.3), at least 2729 lakh people have migrated internationally in which India's contribution is 175 lakhs in 2019. Various studies conducted in this regard have contributed in comprehending the ongoing and after effects of the pandemic. The seriousness with which the analysis is to be made is crucial as the crisis has affected the macro and micro

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dynamics of society enormously. It is here that an emphasis on social science research is made with its focus to analyze the social phenomenon through social categories (global, national, community, caste, class, gender, urban, rural). Against this backdrop, this paper is an attempt to make contextual analysis of the COVID-19 crisis through refraction and reflection various on social categories.

Following the dictum, "human being is a social animal", advisory norms like social distancing popularized by Government seems to play an important role in deciding the interactional pattern of people in the time of pandemic and thereafter. A lot of significant changes are noticeable already impersonal and public spaces of people. This includes 'remaining out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible' (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2020a). It is in respect of cultural differences across the geographies of the world that the notion of personal space is likely affected. In India, people had a narrow personal space which is now demandingly widened, impacting cultural and psychological attributes of an individual.Therefore, the upsurge in COVID-19 cases and consequent prescriptions for social distancing raise a question at sociological consequence of the pandemic, particularly in Indian setting other than its impact on the economy and livelihood. The "strain of distance" is one idea that will certainly perpetuate in the minds of millions of Indians (Patra 2021).

On the contrary to behavioral and cultural challenges, with the announcement of availability of dry ration without identity card in Uttar Pradesh (Gaur 2020) and setting up of community kitchens to feed the hungry and the homeless in other states (Hindustan Times 2020) , the notion of 'common good' had seen an accelerated pace in the community. Also, corporate have donated funds towards building health infrastructure and community kitchens (Economic Times, 2020 April 1; Financial Express 2020). In this initiative members of civil society, political parties and common citizens have also come forward substantiating the notion of 'common good' (Deccan Herald 2020). Members of women's self-help groups have extensively taken part in making face masks, running community kitchens, providing food to the elderly and the quarantined and sensitizing people about health and hygiene (World Bank 2020).

Covid19 Pandemic indeed has changed the patterned social practices and social order along with the culturally embedded assumptions including the way of life, giving substance to the breaching experiment as introduced by Garfinkel which means a disruption in the usual taken for granted everyday activities (Shah 2020). Given our poor spending on healthcare, just 1.28 per cent of country's massive GDP and poor infrastructure (0.8 doctors per 1000 patients) still the existing healthcare as a social order was somehow taken for granted and rationalized by the state along with the masses who had somehow

adjusted with the available facilities (ibid). The medical surveys since the time of pandemic shows, that male patients have outnumbered female patients and this trend is relatively seen in India and worldwide. In India, so far (as of 11 May 2021), the percentage of the COVID-19-infected male patients is 65.49 per cent whereas it is 34.51 per cent in the case of females (based on available data). This has significantly highlighted that apart from the physiological factors, behavioral and cultural factors are equally important in increasing the risks of contamination among men (Patra 2021). This substantially holds that the cultural implications as well by virtue of which a male and female is socialized in regard to maintain special distance both in public and private domain.

Political dynamics and electoral politics also changed the relationship between communities. Having members of one's community as elected representatives meant protection and furthering of one's interests. The notion of common good is compromised in such a context, where people view each other as competitors. The lockdown measures between March and May 2020 have put a halt to mass protests for democracy as the spread of virus became the only political focus and news headline (Players 2020).The impact being such that 'the culture of voice', tradition of dissent and mass protests in the largest democratic set up like India did experience retardation. In India, farmer protests, CAA mass movements (2020) did not sustain against the nationwide lockdown yet continued to operate at virtual platforms. However, worldwide movement against the killing of African-American George Floyd (2020) did not hold back amidst strict lockdown measures even in countries other than America. Considering the policies and strategies to contain the spread of virus in 2020 and 2021, it was reported, in India, mass gatherings in religious places, festivals that encourage mass participation, political rallies and even protests took place in an uncontrolled manner in second wave of COVID-19 against the strict nationwide lockdown on the onset of pandemic in 2020 (Kar et al. 2021).

In this scenario, 'risk of infection' also leads to be an unequal phenomenon because it is more of a political concept as the perception of risk could be selective (Sujatha 2021). The risk therefore for certain sections of society may be put above the risk to others or risks of another kind depending on the perception of decision-making authorities, for instance, the lockdown transferred the economic burden of preventing the risk of infection onto the urban and rural working population, whose risk of death by accidents and exhaustion and the risk of malnutrition and other infections was unaccountable (Sujatha 2021). It was also reported that some governments took advantage of the media focus on the virus spread to silence activists (Lahbib 2020), censor criticisms (Zhang 2020) or take control of the press under cover of lockdown measures. While progressive intellectuals and respective movements consider the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to build a fairer world as they compete with reactionary, capitalist and state actors to shape the meaning of the crisis and the world that may come out of it.

About the distribution of information in this crisis, the societal lag of 'digital divide' has left different sections behind in accessing the right information in the time of pandemic. This problem is rooted in the poor accessibility of digital technology and lack of digital literacy. So, with the coming of sudden pandemic the pervasive digital divide particularly gendered, has affected with an extra plunge now when the source of accessing information is totally digitalized. This limitation therefore, accelerates the challenges when for education, work, ordering, billings and other services having an access to digital technology have suddenly become the only routes to follow. During these challenging times, technology has also made it possible for a majority of masses to stay connected in personal and public space and receive healthcare and other facilities in innovative ways with social distancing intact. This makes the experience a different one than what would have been the case in earlier times. The urban population in India has shown a reasonable degree of compliance to the pandemic-related health messages from the state administration for they were at an advantage as they possess certain level of consciousness in comprehending and analyzing the risk (Sujatha 2021).

With the large users of smart phones in India, more people access the internet and social media turned as a great tool for self-education regarding risks and precautions, eventually aiding vaccination decision-making though it also presents several challenges in the form of misinformation. This leads us to the issue of persistent 'vaccine hesitancy', i.e., reluctance to uptake vaccination. SAGE Working Group on Vaccine Hesitancy (WG) [1] established in 2012 pointed that poor or inadequate communication can negatively influence vaccination uptake and contribute to vaccine hesitancy though poor communication is only a tool not a determinant of vaccine hesitancy. Concluding the analysis of 'vaccine hesitancy' in economies- low-income countries, lower-middle-income countries, upper-middle-income countries in comparison to Russia and the United States (the forefront of vaccine research and development), it was found that the average acceptance rate across the full set of studies in lower middle income countries (including India) was 80.3 per cent which was even higher than that of samples from the United States (64.6 per cent) and Russia (30.4 per cent). The data indicated that vaccine acceptance is substantiated by an interest in personal protection against COVID-19, whereas concerns about side effects are the most common reasons for hesitancy (Machingaidze and Wiysonge 2021).

Sociology of pandemics presents one of the inexorable feature of society in these times- with the COVID crisis, people of suspected Asian or Chinese origin have been exposed to 'Othering' and stigmatization in many countries, be it the governments blamed particular social groups or stigmatization spread in the community (Zinn 2021). Talking particularly of Indian society, stigmatization works on a formal level, when government regulation places 'stickers' on gates to mark confirmed COVID-19 cases, but also on an informal

level when neighbors stay away, or vendors no longer sell to families of infected people (Joshi and Swarnakar 2021). Even though everybody is equally vulnerable to infection, a marginalized social group can become stigmatized even when not infected due to the local perception and management of risk.The aspect of migration of people in informal sector in the time of COVID-19 crisis unlike other affluent nations highlighted the unpreparedness of the authorities in India. While mobility is synonymous to development, it turned devastating for India especially informal sector by the outcome of the decisions of lockdown in the pandemic. The term 'reverse migration' became popular in use during these times with the susceptibility of migrants at its peak in dialogue.

Needless to say, all the gender communities are witnessing the consequences of the crisis, yet there are vulnerable sections of society who turn out to become more vulnerable when they face a situation like this. Therefore, the implications of corona virus have hit different genders differently. The vulnerable groups of society consists of women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, aged, disabled, poor migrants, people living with HIV/ AIDS and sexual minorities. Inequalities have become more salient as poor people and minorities are more affected by the virus. The domestic workers have to undergo the pain of both economical and social marginalization due to lockdown. These workers,find themselves unemployed and are suddenly seen as carriers of contagion as they cannot maintain and afford the middle class etiquettes of hygiene and decent health, when ironically it was well-to-do middle class Indians who brought COVID-19 infection in the country with them (Baviskar 2020).

Further speaking of the women in the Indian society, it turns out them being impacted by the consequences of COVID-19 crisis differentially, most evidently because of deep rooted customs and practices of patriarchy. In the state of pandemic, when everyone is expected to be working from home, there has been reported upsurge in cases of domestic and sexual violence in conjugal relationships and it has been reported that girls have become victim of sexual violence to the family relatives. The cause of this situation reported, are socio-economic like the loss of jobs of men working in private sectors, petty workers, migrants. They tend to release their frustration by practicing violence at home.

Women in the informal sector like street vending have struck with survival threat and are in a deteriorated state as very few or nobody visited the roadside due to the fear of contracting the virus (Pattanaik 2021). As per the reports of the Periodic Survey of India (2017-18), there were around 11.9 million street vendors in the country, out of which 1.2 million were women (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation). Among so many arenas of women life another important parameter affected is the accessibility to health and hygiene care. Whether it is the section of women from well off families or from poor laborer class, the need of immediate medical help has been uniformly affected due to the non availability of doctors in the lockdown phase. The situation with poor women

is more critical when the cases of pregnant women delivering on road during the course of reverse migration were reported. Also, the women in the profession of prostitution have suffered financially a worst phase and in many cases, they were not rendered help by the NGOs who are meant to work for them.

The lives of youth are continuously experiencing rapid change. From their online life to now spending a good time with their families has brought the age-old ethos of the traditional family back. Though the fact remains that the on screen time has considerably increased during lockdown as people kill time online. On educational front, students' different socio-economic backgrounds are seen to affect due to sudden shift to online education system which creates unavoidable demand of internet, smart phones, desktop and laptop raising questions on persisting digital divide. This situation further creates a possibility of deterioration in the prevailing educational inequalities in our country (Pattanaik 2021).The teachers teaching in rural schools are also not well trained to take online classes. It was further observed that there is a wide communication gap between the student community and the educational authorities regarding various guidelines being issued by the authorities (Kumar and Mishra 2020).

Studying the impact of pandemic on families in Indian society, we need to consider the situation of women who from ages have significantly justified their role in nurturing a household with immense care and are expected to do so even today. Even in a world where women have stepped out and are contributing in workplace, this expectation tends to co-exist with them, thereby, creating a situation of 'dual-burden'. Now, in the state of pandemic, this practice takes up another level to tripling her burden where her role in catering with emotional and mental health multiplies exponentially. This is evident in the form of her increased labor for unpaid care and domestic work- taking care of elderly, children and their online classes and homework, household chores as a never ending situation with the women whether she is working from home or a homemaker.

In the case of working women, the sense of expectation for fulfilling these duties,never finds escape even if she is working from home. However, in many families, due to strict stay-at-home orders, there is evident shift in the household dynamics, i.e. male members assisting the female members in sharing the responsibility of household chores has potentially shown the possibility of creating a more gender neutral environment in homes. There are media reports about husbands cooking and cleaning utensils (Borah 2020). Though cases of men taking 'selfies' of themselves proudly while doing household chores are more like a temporary celebration yet extraordinary as they indulged into what has been culturally bracketed as women's work and with the end of lockdown the invisible and underpaid efforts of women into household chores over the years will not lead to transformations. Even in such situation it is quite visible that tasks like going out to buy grocery is still task undertaken by men and activities related to cleaning, cooking, child-rearing fall in the purview of women, thereby maintaining of conventional

roles continues (Baviskar 2020).

Furthermore, the cases of depression and suicides were also reported in newspapers and magazines owing to the fear of COVID-19 infection and economic crises because of nationwide lock down. These incidents hence claimed that the nature of committing suicide is anomic, egoistic and altruistic in the current pandemic (Patel and Kumar 2021).

Conclusion

The crisis of pandemic has impacted the lives of people from different strata which very evidently show, the equal pandemic for all has affected all unequally. It significantly highlights the structural and functional loopholes of our society which have come to surface in the period of COVID-19 crisis. In this phase, reporting of situation of different sections of people from all spheres of society is not only a depiction of counting the prevailing problems but to alarm and revisit the institutions of the society to take necessary initiatives in creating conducive environment in personal and public space. Another important aspect that this pandemic has highlighted the necessary structural and functional measures that Government and its agencies need to take so that the society is equipped to combat such devastating crisis further. While the invention of a COVID-19 vaccine in India and acceleration of its production is a commendable technocratic solution to such an emergency, this can neither be a substitute for better health infrastructure, nor is it sustainable in the long run. Finally, as a sociological residue of pandemic, where the encouraged social distancing is a necessitated measure challenging the age old Indian practice of reasonable closeness and acceptable physical proximity, the tweaked gender roles in families have potentially shown the possibility of creating a more gender neutral environment in homes. Concluding with the prospective of call that pandemic evoke for researchers and social scientists- to advance in new insights, deep-dialogues, contextual analysis and evidence based research which will facilitate public policy to address the well being of masses, health and hygiene, socio-economic issues in ultimately meeting the sustainable development goals. Social socialists not only have a responsibilty to describe and analyze the consequences but also to actively propose comitments to public sphere and social movements.

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