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**SOCIAL DISTANCING, COVID-19, AND
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“It was the organic presence of bhakti in Indian history that fascinated Tagore.... Furthermore...to account for the fact that the bhakti movement... often failed to achieve the promises it seemed to make, namely, to override differences between Hindus and Muslims and to advance the cause of the poor and despised. How can we deal with these issues? ... A major aim of network theory is to displace the illusion that individual actors are the engines of history, and this surely resonates with bhakti despite its personalist focus.”

John Stratton Hawley, *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 295-6.

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Editorial

Social Distancing, Covid-19, and Experiential Narratives II

Bikash Sarma

As we are steering through an unprecedented epoch of Covid-19, desperate attempts have been made to renew existential meanings as an underside to the unbridled meaninglessness and existential defeat in the world outside.

As the “everyday familiarity collapse[d]” and uncanniness or ‘un-home-like’ took over, the spatially constrained and temporally disoriented self began an anxious search for the “metaphor for existence.”¹ Post the global lockdown to ‘tame’ the virus, home has become the site where the metaphor for existence is materially and discursively situated: either *being* at home or longing for one, as with the case of thousands of migrant workers in India who have walked miles – some to death – in search of this metaphor.

Martin Heidegger contends:

In anxiety one feels ‘*uncanny*’. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the “nothing and nowhere”. But here “uncanniness” also means “not-being-at-home” ...Being-in enters into the existential ‘mode’ of the “not-at-home”. Nothing else is meant by our talk about ‘uncanniness.’²

In uncanniness, the self flees from the “threat to its everyday lostness” – a withdrawal from the ‘publicness’ and from the absorption in the world - even “though the very world itself is *still* ‘there’, and ‘there’ more *obtrusively*.”³ When the conceptuality – of the uncanny situation and human condition as a result of

¹ Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. by S. Rendell (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997).

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Translated by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 233.

³ *Ibid.*, 233-4.

the former—is itself evasive, a metaphor not only provides the epistemological reserve for the constitution of existential concepts, but also points “back towards the connection with the life-world as the constant motivating support...”⁴

On a similar note Leela Gandhi has made an important point on the conceptuality of a phenomenon. Apart from an expressed skepticism towards almost everything, there has emerged, “a state of consciousness about things we have known for a very long time without bringing to the forefront of understanding...It is an orientation to what is already there but so much in plain view as to be unintelligible”⁵

With these two crucial themes for the viral times—finding a metaphor amidst growing scepticism and for re invoking a consciousness for long distorted, we at Salesian College Publications set the journey to publish a second issue on “Social Distancing, Covid-19, and Experiential Narratives.”

George Thadathil in his paper “Pain: The Door to Agony and Ecstasy in Time of Covid-19 Pandemic” locate pain—mental and physical—at the intersections of spiritual-philosophy and contingencies of viral agony. Through an extrapolation of dialectics of *vipassana* as mode of being and becoming, the paper situates pain through the exegesis of experience and the current pandemic—as an expression immanent within healing.

Saravanan Velusamy in his paper “Media, Power and the Pandemic: Production of Fear, Discipline and a Distraught Self” tries to understand the role of media during pandemic times and decipher the kind of self it produces given media’s strong influence in interpreting the world for its viewers.

Abhijit Ray in the paper “Indian workers in Dubai: City, Fear and Belongingness” analyses two contradictory human experience—

⁴ Blumenberg cited in Steven Rendall, “Translator’s introduction” to *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 4.

⁵ Leela Gandhi, “Skeptical Conditions”, *Critical Inquiry* 47, 2020: 115-118.

belongingness and fear in the context of Indian workers working in Dubai during the pandemic. He argues that the pandemic magnified certain aspects of the workers working in Dubai that often remain invisible in the popular public domain.

Soroj Mullick in “Befriending the Broken Body: Understanding the Post-Pandemic Body” approaches the impact the pandemic has had on innumerable human bodies, with a philosophico-theological reflection, building on the biblical insights into the human body and the changes it has undergone within Christian tradition.

Paul Punii & Dominic Meyieho in their paper “The Poumai Naga agricultural festivities and rituals vis-a-vis folklores: Covid-19 pandemic application” harping on the ethnographic details of Poumai Naga agricultural festivals underlines the impact of Covid-19 on these rituals.

Augustine Joseph *et.al.* in their paper, “A Longitudinal Study on the Psycho-Sociological Impact of COVID -19 lockdown on College Students & Faculty” brings an assessment of the fear and anxiety among the faculty and students of Salesian College. From the data accumulated through a series of online questionnaires, the paper analyses the impact of the lockdown on a diverse range of indicators – that includes boredom, aspects of the future, sociality – conducted with a group of faculty and students of the college.

Anmol Mongia in her general commentary “Will the Circus come to town? : Indian Circus Arts swinging between a Kafka moment and a *nouveau* moment” explores the hope of revival for the once esteemed performing art form – Circus – both as an art form and a life tool.

Vasudeva K. Naidu in the general commentary “Boredom, time and the creative self during a lockdown” explicates on the conceptuality of boredom through a literary-philosophical journey during the lockdown.

Pain: The Door to Agony and Ecstasy in Time of Covid-19 Pandemic

George Thadathil

The paper attempts to locate pain - mental and physical - at the intersections of spiritual-philosophy and contingencies of viral agony. Through an extrapolation of dialectics of *vipassana* as mode of being and becoming, the paper situates pain through the exegesis of experience and the current pandemic - as an expression immanent within healing.

Keywords: Pain, *vipassana*, spiritual-philosophy, pandemic, being.

Pain is a human condition. Pain is experienced in different ways - mental or physical-as part of being a bodily entity. To be human is to be 'sense-driven' - as with the animals. To be human is to be 'reason-and-faith-driven' person. It justifies the classical definition of the human as a 'rational animal'. Humans are capable of inflicting pain and experience pain being inflicted upon; even more, while experiencing pain can inflict pain on others and/or self. The ability to experience pain is intrinsic to being human, though there are medically testified persons who do not feel pain, even as there are persons who feel pain acutely more than others. Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, reporter for *National Geographic* elaborates this through a case study:

Norris, who lives in a Los Angeles suburb, ...[is one who has] become adept at wearing a mask of serenity to hide his pain. I never saw him wince. When his agony is especially intense, his wife of 31 years, Marianne, says she can tell by a certain stillness she sees in his eyes. For three decades ever since he underwent radiation therapy, he has been experiencing acute pain, though cured of the cancer for which he undertook the treatment. He has become 'an advocate for chronic pain sufferers and started a support group. There are over 50 million people with chronic pain in US alone and millions more all over the world for varying types of causes.¹

¹ Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, "A World of Pain", *National Geographic*, January 2020, 40.

Pain, suffering or physical agony, disrupts the normal flow of life. The capacity to feel pain, though regarded as debilitating, is a gift humankind shares with the animal kingdom enabling the natural recoiling from pain-causing objects and situations. It helps avoid injury serving as an alarm system to succeed in self-preservation. Therefore, scientifically speaking:

The sentries in this system are special class of sensory neurons called nociceptors, which sit close to the spine, with their fibers extending into the skin, the lungs, the gut, and other parts of the body. They're equipped to sense different kinds of harmful stimuli: a knife's cut, the heat of molten wax, the burn of acid. When nociceptors detect any of these threats, they send electrical signals to the spinal cord, which transmits them via other neurons to the brain. Higher order neurons in the cortex—the final destination of this ascending pain pathway—translate this input into the perception of pain.²

The perception of pain, as narrated above and in all its range of intensity, is a neural activity coordinated by the brain. These pain receptors and nociceptors have been studied in the attempts to lessen pain. In these testing processes drugs, poisons, intoxicants and even psychedelic VR (virtual reality) has been fed to the brain to gauge their ability to control pain perception. While these are medical experiments and bio inducers, there have been spiritual attempts to conquer pain.

'Vipassana' is one such attempt to transcend pain. It emphasizes, apparently rather simplistically, the attention to pain—while being in pain—as the possible way to overcome pain. It focuses on ceding to pain without judgmental attitude of condemning nor having undue attachment. The dispassionate observation of the flow of life, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, painful or joyful, with equanimity creates over a period of extensive focused sitting, a door to transcend pain. Acceptance of reality as it is, here and now, without any inducements, enhancers, depressants, negators, but pure unbiased, here and now observation, opens the door.³

² Ibid.

³ Cf. Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, Maharashtra: www.vri.dhamma.org.

Vipassana as a meditation technique guides one through this observation strategy and access to reality without hindrance, without colouring and coding, without bias or ideology or faith. One might rightfully observe it as emerging from the Buddhist tradition and therefore, as invested with the worldview of the Buddhist understanding of life. Yet, as both faith and reason are fundamental categories of being, even as space and time, to be able to observe reality with sense and intellect, one cannot deny the operation of both sense and mind, reason and faith, in the very decision to observe and continue to observe irrespective of what happens, till one begins to see for oneself the truth of the reality unfolding itself. This was the project of Buddha, from the plethora of yogic practices available in his day, brought to perfection by himself in and through his own enlightenment. One could see some parallels in the Meditations of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and David Hume (1711-1776), both in divergent ways, and of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) bringing them into synthetic a priori synchronization,⁴ all of them starting from the experience of reality – observed and assessed for its truthfulness – with their own penetrating minds.

Doing vipassana one gets a firsthand inner experience of how pain arises and disappears – in one's own body mind complex that constitutes the self/person. Pain whether physical or mental – arises, and falls or disappears. There is a fluctuation in the pain, its intensity, its arising and disappearing. Therefore, this movement from pain to painlessness and back to pain, could be interpreted as one way of transcending pain. It is there and yet it is not there – both become real experience for the one who is observing it dispassionately. Of course, can that be done? Can one be dispassionate while in pain? This is the point of acute observation, intense, clarified, pure observation that vipassana teaches – as possible.

Pain is therefore, both a bodily state and an emotional state: the body in pain, creates an emotion, and the emotion of pain makes one see and feel it in one's body as breathlessness, tension, stress,

⁴ Cf. Steven Moctezuma, "Kant's synthetic a priori knowledge", April 24, 2018. <https://medium.com/@smoctezuma/kants-synthetic-a-priori-knowledge-8c196dbd230f>

fear, timidity, sweating and specific body parts as crunching. These pains and their sources, the causes and its sense-perceptions through neurons and nociceptors have been studied by scientists. These pains and the way to cope with them have been suggested by meditators. The observation of the scientific kind brings out certain information about the source, the cause and the mode in which it is spread and felt, and can be camouflaged, or hidden, or borne by the individual. Even so, the meditators, in their observation with intent concentration, and equanimity and equidistance from the pain, also come to see its dissociation from the brain-mind that registers the pain, and allows the same pain to be transcended into bliss.

Does it Help? Understanding the Observation

At this point, presuming the truth of the scientific observation as well as the scientifically oriented meditative observation, and what it can do to oneself and through self to wider network of persons around oneself or the practicing community, we could introduce the theoretical understanding of this phenomenon—from a psychological, political as well as theological dimension. It would attempt to understand acts of withdrawal (meditative/mindfulness observation) in intense moments of engagement or attachment.

Firstly, withdrawal, has primarily a psychological dimension. It is a retrieval of something in one's consciousness, on the one hand, and allowing it to happen by closing one's attention to other external immediate requirements, on the other. In this choice itself, one could presume a wellness project, as to distance in order to keep mental calm, to view the conflictual situation, internal or external in all its implications, and to assess various ways of coping with it. This choice therefore of a withdrawal—as a psychological decision—is something that a person makes consciously in order to be more attentive to the problems at hand, rather than totally abandoning the cause or attempting to be dispassionate merely for one's peace of mind.

Secondly, the very same choice of withdrawal could be looked at politically, as a mode of resistance, and the quality of that resistance not always as defined by the decibel or the spread of media reach

it achieves. My memories go back to visiting a meditation centre where over 120 meditators were engrossed in vipassana—a centre hidden away in the mountain reserves of Anisakan in Myanmar even as the political turmoil in the northern states continued and the unrest of under development simmered in the capital. And, of another visit wherein two dozen meditators from all walks of life in a hidden enclave in the forests of East Sikkim, even as the state was redefining itself as the most organic-food production and consumption oriented state in the country. The very attempts by the teachers of schools and colleges in this enclave in Sikkim to sit in for vipassana and experiment the ways—to indigenize education and to play a mediatory role between the eastern and western technologies of the self. What would be the ways in which these acts amidst an unsettled population be recalled as?

There are experiences that do not fight the dominant systems over identity or power. Acts of resistance shelter experiences in their depths that generate new ways of living that the dominant systems are unaware of or have not yet been able to control, those that collectively illuminate care for Life in the areas of education, health, production and care for one another.⁵

Thirdly, in these individuated or non-networked group's independent acts of resistance—in view of neutrality and approaches other than the dominant—one could see a divine anarchy. Theologically speaking this notion draws inspiration from the Syro-Malankara⁶ liturgical veneration of an empty cave as a theophany and also the Jewish mystical texts that refer to abandoning the illusion of being separate from something else, as the opening to the life that has no beginning and no end. It is also taking grips over an insight provided by Raimondo Panikkar that, 'the only possible mediation' for one who opens to the divine mystery was nothing less than mere 'naked existence'. In his words:

⁵ Juan Carlos La Puente Tapia, "Acts of Resistance: Messianic Force of Divine Anarchy", in Carlos Mendoza-Alvarez and Thierry-Marie Courau (eds) *Concilium: Decolonial Theology: Violence, Resistance and Spiritualities*, 2020/1 *International Journal of Theology*, 92.

⁶ See, <https://catholicsindia.in/the-syro-malankara-church>.

‘We have to be ‘nothing’ to experience in ourselves the Creator of nothingness.’⁷

As an expert in bringing together different mystical traditions, he is authoritative when he affirms: ‘this becoming aware, that in ourselves, we are without beginning and without end is precisely the experience of divinity.’⁸ This merging of the nothingness and the emptiness of the mind and the awareness to the here and now, with the neutrality of the absolute openness of the moment is what in Meister Eckhart’s (1260-1328) experience as narrated by his disciple Juan Taulero in the fourteenth century, claims: “Let the abyss of the divine darkness, known only by itself and unknown by all things, enlighten you. This blessed abyss, unknown and nameless, will be more beloved and will attract souls more than all that the saints in blessedness may know of divine being.”⁹ Of course on an aside, this quote reminds me of what I heard decades ago, being with an international group of young people, in Taize, France: “I was an atheist, until I discovered, I am God.”¹⁰

Eckhart himself refers to this abyss as that place—wherein the superabundant birth of divine love as pure encounter, pure relatedness as happening—in the words: “You must plunge you ‘being you’ in his ‘being him’ so that ‘yours’ and ‘his’ becomes a ‘my-being’ through mutual possession in love.”¹¹ It is the prescience of the sage at play and the meditator is on the way to the immersion into that insightful living. Therefore, as Raimondo Panikkar reminds: ‘the sage is the person who has the heart of the whole people’ and Meister Eckhart, repeating a popular belief say that ‘anyone who knows themselves, knows all creatures’ (specifically in his treatise on *The Nobleman*). This chain uniting everything with everything else makes us one with nature through contemplation, prayer, glory,

⁷ Raimon Panikkar, *The Experience of God, icons of the Mystery*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 154.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹ Quoted from Juan Carlos La Puente, 96.

¹⁰ George Thadathil, Unpublished Diary Notes, July 1994.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

but also through our participation in the pains of creation, whether pains of birth or despair.¹²

Painfully Neutral or Neutrality in Pain?

In doing Vipassana, the ability to be 'neutral' in observing—the happening and response to it—can be identified as the secret that unveils the unknown about the nature of pain. The ability to be equipoised: in attending to whatever arises and passes in the here and now! This training begins with simple observation of breath—as it is—uncontrolled, normal, natural breathing—the undeniable sign of life that lurks in the body and links the body with the mind/soul/spirit that hovers in and around the body, in it and everywhere, and over and above it as it were. The breath becomes the vehicle and object of observation by the mind that is kept alive by the same breath. Dispassionately observing it for hours on end, being true to the factuality of the here and now— with no intoxicants, external inducers— allows for the natural bare true reality to expose itself as containing the access point—door—to something trans-real, something extra ordinary. The access to an altered state of consciousness happens, even as you are aware of the transition—of being here and of being not here, or being over-and-above being here and now. It is an experience that has been recorded and verified experimentally by the psychologists—of the explorations into breath-work, psychedelics and drug induced meditations and healing experiences.¹³ These transitions into the altered state of consciousness that happens simply through the normal natural breathing observed through the dispassionate neutral, equipoised observation strategies of vipassana, takes one to the altered state and does many things to a person.¹⁴

¹² Raimon Panikkar, op cit., 135.

¹³ Cf. Stanislav Grof, *The Transpersonal Vision: The Healing Potential of Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness*, (California: Sounds True, 2006); *Beyond the Brain: Birth death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy* (New York: SUNY Press, 1985).

¹⁴ S. N. Goenka, *The Discourse Summaries*, (Bombay: Vipashayan Vishodhan Vinyas, 1989).

The ability to cope with pain is one such accomplishment or giftedness of being a vipassana meditator. It always begins with and falls back to the natural realistic observation of the 'pleasant and the unpleasant' in the here and now; pain in varying degrees happens to be variants of this pleasant-unpleasant spectrum that presents itself to oneself at any given moment: facing it enables to deal with it, even as drugging it helps, or VR inducement helps. In principle and as from experience, one cannot also rule out the very opposite happening from unattended pain—whether self-induced or other induced. The long hours of sitting and the willingness to submit to the instructor and the guidance—that come from a tradition of experienced meditators—can take one to the intended goal of ecstasy, transcendence of pain, and access to non-ordinary states of consciousness and healing.

The agony of the meditator also means accounting for the impact—the process of breathing with intense concentration has on the breather, the meditator. One observation has been that the outcome is a shallow breathing phase into which the brain enters after a while. As a result, there could also be the opposite outcome. Someone not succeeding to find the door and make the entry into the 'transcendence of pain,' rather succumbs and the mind-body integrity breaks down and one is left with access to other orders of pain, or discordance which does not add up to 'normal living' as judged from the majoritarian perspective of the 'normal'. Whether this happens only to those who have had a history, or a hereditary reason to be susceptible again needs verification.¹⁵ The impact such phases of prolonged sitting with shallow breathing, and its resultant low intake of oxygen into the brain system has also been mapped. The researches of the Mind and Life Institute and the Rhode Island University on the negative impact of prolonged meditation on the practitioners stand as testimony.¹⁶

The agony and ecstasy component, the shifting experiences of the pleasant and unpleasant again leaves room for a twin

¹⁵ <https://www.mindandlife.org/insights/pain-relief-without-opioids/>

¹⁶ <https://www.mindandlife.org/insights/meditation-for-mental-health-how-does-mindfulness-compare-to-other-treatments/>

interpretation: one, acknowledging the truthfulness of life as an experience of a mixed bag of the pleasant and the unpleasant, joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure; and the other, an acknowledgement of the fact that this neutral approach to life and its experiences is not everyone's cup of tea, and there are individuals who cave in and are susceptible to be influenced by one or the other to an extent of losing the balance of life, making the experience a detrimental one for the life thereafter, calling for other interventions of the medical or psychiatric kind to alleviate the situation.

The practitioner then has a choice: either to continue with the vipassana mode of dispassionate observation of one's life trajectory, its ups and downs, and use this as coping strategy; or, to return to conventional medication, psychiatry or counseling to cope with the life trajectory. The source of the pain could be the direct engagement with the external world of people and events, action and its repercussions, best exemplified in the emotion of anger and all sorts of irritants that dog the day of an individual; or, it could be the fears that lurk in the subconscious of one's self, ever fretful of an unseen, unexpected cause for anxiety; fear, trepidation, danger all round, best represented in the dreams that wake you to fear something uncanny, untoward that is lurking behind the corner; or, there are the hidden residues of the suppressed and hitherto unacknowledged aspects of the hurts of the past years and lives ever threatening to surface as real nightmares drowning one in the sorrow of the past revisited. Said otherwise, hidden worries and anxieties surfacing from the inner depth that one never thought were there; the unconscious letting loose its floodgates as it were. Harnessing these fears, angers and the sum of pain that (some call as the pain-body)¹⁷ and dealing with them is what the vipassana mode of handling pain is about. Allow it to surface, let the turbulence created on the calm surface of the quiet lake of a peaceful mind, be dealt by the keenly observant perceptive mind like a laser that can burn away those pains in the equanimous awareness of the moment

¹⁷ Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, (Vancouver: New World Library, 1999). <https://www.newworldlibrary.com/Blog/tabid/767/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/438/DISSOLVING-THE-PAIN-BODY-An-excerpt-from-THE-POWER-OF-NOW-by-Eckhart-Tolle.aspx#.X7ClqczbIV>

and let the inner depths be clarified and the muddled waters cleared, bringing the mind back to its peaceful rest. It enables the mind to constantly expand and hold whatever it is that surfaces and enables it to continue despite the storms raging round with the inner quiet of an observer of passions and violence.

The way to integrity and wholeness, to wellbeing and happiness of the kind that does not shy away from pain is what vipassana offers. It is the ancient mode of VR to cope with pain without the drugs and anesthetics.

The internalization of Pain: Dukkha as Suffering in Covid Times

Is there a collective pain? Does mob violence erupt as a result of collective repressed anger seeking expression? Fear seeking mitigation? Is pain healing itself like the festering wound being healed through the emission of puss? Life is dukkha/suffering and there is a way out of suffering—is it to not-suffer or a way out through suffering? Is pain a door of entry into the paradise (land/mental space) of non-suffering—as is experientially known by the self? Does one suffer, and endure pain only for oneself or for another? Does one inflict pain on self and on another through one's actions—one's words (written, spoken, thought)?¹⁸

The internalization of pain happens when the physical pain leaves a mark on mental distress as against bringing sustenance through the ability to bear it. The mental spiritual agony of not being able to do anything to alleviate the pain of others—individuals or a collective—and instead leaves physical traces or scars, the stigmata, on the body of the sufferer:

Pain, it turns out, is a complex, subjective phenomenon that is shaped by the particular brain that's experiencing it. How pain signals are

18 [I can recall the experience of the impact of reading one's pain/suffering on one's body, in one's mind the possession of the spirit of the words and the way it wounds in narrating the words unveiling the pain suffered – just on reading it] The distant is not in the now—for it takes light years to be there where the stars are shining right now (as being there). The Now is only Here. So, every now is a here and now.

ultimately translated into painful sensations can be influenced by a person's emotional state. The context in which the pain is being perceived also can alter how it feels, as evidenced by the pleasantness of the aches that follow a strenuous workout or the desire for a second helping of a spicy dish despite the punishing sting it delivers to the tongue.¹⁹

However subjective a phenomenon is, an objective materiality is ingrained as well to it, as he goes on to narrate in the same article with which we began with:

Upon registering the pain, the brain attempts to counteract it. Neural networks in the brain send electrical signals down the spinal cord along what's known as the descending pain pathway, triggering the release of endorphins and other natural opioids. These biochemicals inhibit ascending pain signals, effectively reducing the amount of pain perceived.²⁰

These are the outcome of the research done on how pain signals are communicated from sensory nerves to the brain and how the brain perceives the sensation of pain. The lasting of the pain for more than three months after the injury, considered chronic pain, and pain as disease have from a medical point of view helped overcome earlier bias against patients who complained of pain without physical visible cause. Are they, then the saints and martyrs of a modern awareness and/or victims of nature's vagaries, impacting itself on individuals just as tsunamis and pandemics do on a human collective upon the earth?

¹⁹ Yudhijit, 41.

²⁰ Yudhijit, 40.

Media, Power and the Pandemic: Production of Fear, Discipline and a Distraught Self

Saravanan Velusamy

Pandemic needs a globalized world where we have to live with the risks that come with it. Television is a crucial communication device that shapes public perception and mediates our comprehension of the outside world. It also forms part of the ideological apparatus that aids in reproducing the dominant perception of reality among the masses. This article is based on observations made of the TRP-driven TV content produced during the lockdown period, in order to interpret the meaning that a projected reality produces. The article intertwines both: how government uses television to bring order as they tackle the situation and how advertisement on the other hand promote sales during crisis, both of which tries to convince the 'consumer-citizen' that these are extraordinary times but normalcy is returning. The objective of this paper is to understand the role of media during pandemic times and decipher the kind of self it produces given its strong influence in interpreting the world for its viewers.

Key Words: TRP-driven media, power, pandemic, fear and discipline, self.

Introduction

The contagious and the life-threatening COVID-19 have caused havoc in the lives of ordinary citizens in India. The shutting down of business operations during lockdown and heavily restricted inter-district and inter-state movement had put the economy in a limbo. Jobs and livelihoods were lost as the Prime Minister called for greater self-reliance. Clearly, the fear of likely infection by the virus did not baffle them as much as the fear of losing their livelihoods and the fear of uncertainty that loomed large. Lockdown was a drastic step to control the virus for a country that run on migrant laborers and daily-wage workers. Such measures expose state display of power and imposition of control in a democracy.

People in India were still trying to make sense of the catastrophe that confront them. They were glued to their television screens for daily updates on the infection rates, the relief measures taken and the new regulations that would form part of the new normal. Television media gained greater significance during lockdowns. The stories of tragic events that television brought home daily confirmed of the kind of risk society we have built, the consequences of which would be borne by generations to come. According to Ulrich Beck, the systematic accumulation of risk an industrial society produces in the process of wealth creation often affects the vulnerable sections the most and cause irreversible harm to the society as a whole.¹ Do citizens as political subjects have the reflexive capacity to understand the structural conditions that produce risks? Is public engagement during the pandemic possible amidst the noisy distractions produced by the television media? Can citizens think critically despite the information overload? How do we understand the distressed subjectivities that pandemic and its everyday telecasting produce? This article does not intend to answer these questions necessarily but provide reasons and interpretations to emphasize on their relevance and significance for our times.

The objective of this paper is to understand the role of media during pandemic times and interpret the meaning based on how it fashions itself and how it presents before us. Through its agenda-setting function and production of news and entertainment content, television media especially the popular ones by catering to its audience also shapes them. This article uses an interpretative-deductive framework to comprehend media behavior and state response during pandemic times in India.

Mass media can be Janus-faced in that it can act as an agent fostering democratic ideals (keeping the public informed) yet undermine the same by disempowering the individuals through creating disorientation in them. Television mediates this process as a mass communication device to keep the public informed about

¹ For more discussions on Beck's idea of 'risk society' see <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/risk-society>.

the health crisis and at the same time keeping them engaged (or disengaged). The institution of media has heterogeneous actors. A few News editors and Media channels (national and regional), including those independent ones that operate via alternative digital platforms, did keep up with their ground reporting on Covid-19 outbreak and how the humanitarian crisis unfolded thereafter. Yet, the TRP-driven news channels, often pro-government in their approach, did divert a lot of attention away from the tragedy that the pandemic brought. In this article, I intend to discuss TRP Media's potential to keep the distraught individual subjects into a homogenized lot of docile selves, as most of the TV channels had already resumed with their news and general entertainment programming.

Although, information is a significant tool to safeguard us from the virus, the kind of television contents one was exposed to on a daily basis and how they have been framed and packaged, all do influence and shape viewers' perception and behavior. As a conduit of ideas and messages, television particularly is a crucial medium especially during the times of a pandemic-induced lockdown – since they become their only window to the world. One of the arguments of this paper is that citizens especially the poor, internalized fear and discipline to stay indoors and to comply with the state orders. This was made possible through everyday broadcasting of 'state responses' to the rapid spread of the virus. People realized gradually that these were no ordinary times. Thanks to the pervasive presence of media, viewer-citizens could bear witness to a certain 'spectacle of disaster' to use Baudrillard's phrase, that makes them experience fear as local as it is global and as simulated as it is real.² Baudrillard uses the phrase 'spectacle of disaster' as a media-simulated reality that dilutes its meaning and intensity wherein individuals lose their capacity to respond appropriately, leading to the 'the end of the social' and hence 'events' end up being mere signs, images

² These arguments are developed from a blog post the author wrote earlier. See S. Velusamy, "Media In Pandemic Times: Fear, Discipline And Commercial Breaks," *Doing Sociology*, May 25, 2020. Retrieved August 25 from <https://doingsociology2020.blogspot.com/2020/05/media-in-pandemic-times-state-democracy.html>

and a spectacle.³ The disorientation produced acts as a barrier for consciousness awakening or collective action because the public starts internalizing the crisis and begin to look at it, in the words of the Finance Minister of India, 'as an act of god'.

The role of television media is significant here because while it produced anxiety and fear to manufacture consent among citizens as I argue here, it also engaged in the production of hope through public dissemination of critical health communication. In the past—every time an epidemic breaks out—the coverage on media across the world has been overwhelmingly large, while most of them indicate circumstances to be fearful, others offered assurance and solace. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, a professor in journalism who studies media reporting of the virus outbreak says, “the prominence of fear as a theme in reports of the coronavirus suggests that much of the coverage of the outbreak is more a reflection of public fear than informative of what is actually happening in terms of the spread of the virus.”⁴ In India, while some media channels fostered scientific information and operated within standard procedures and journalistic ethics, others did not shy away from spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories. Initially, pro-government media channels in India even involved in religious profiling of the Covid-19 spread after the *TablighiJamat* conference. While viewers watched these with grief and anguish, the same television also distracted us with the glamour of reality shows, soap operas, the Mahabharata and Ramayana series and the kind of insidious commercial ads that deceives us into thinking that things are normal or getting normal. It is a truly schizophrenic moment.

The wider and overwhelming coverage of state response to mitigate the virus spread as against covering the plight of the poor and the marginalized during the lockdown implies that much of the

³ J. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 87-100.

⁴ K. Wahl-Jorgensen, “Coronavirus: how media coverage of epidemics often stokes fear and panic,” *The Conversation*, April 15, 2020. Retrieved August 2, 2020 from <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-how-media-coverage-of-epidemics-often-stokes-fear-and-panic-131844>

media serves the state and the market forces in India. Government tendency to unleash force upon the poor and repress unrest was not given sufficient attention whenever public action laid bare the discrepancies in governance, inadequacy of measures taken, and pointed out the existing fault lines in the governance of the crisis. Moreover, government action to incarcerate dissenting voices did not receive as much attention as most of the media stayed away from covering issues that hurt the ruling dispensation.⁵

Singh feared how democratic governments in India (both state and central) could take an autocratic turn if their behaviour goes uncriticized and unregulated. Media entities and reporters were asked by the BJP government to report news positively. Expecting the media to deliver Covid-19 news and government provided messages with a streak of positivity puts media freedom at jeopardy and could amount to direct influence upon news reportage.⁶ The kind of news stories selected, their relevance, emphasis and the comprehensiveness with which they were covered, ought to direct the viewers towards making informed opinion. These are important in determining how professional and fair a news media is. We also know how news coverage around an issue can turn public attention towards it and sustain their interest. The agenda-setting function of the media is crucial to influence public opinion and action towards resolving any issue at hand.⁷ On the other hand, by ways of brushing aside, misdirecting attention and diluting the significance of a topic or viewpoint, these dominating news channels (the TRP-driven media) exercise their power over their audience by choosing for them what news and narratives to consume. This way, the television media kept the populace more deceived and distracted both for commercial and ideological reasons making limited space for public engagement and critical reflection.

⁵ B. Singh, "Media in the Time of COVID-19," *Economic and Political Weekly* 55, 16(2020): 1-6.

⁶ Sagar, "Speaking Positivity to Power," *The Caravan*, May 31, 2020. Retrieved July 26, 2020 from <https://caravanmagazine.in/media/hours-before-lockdown-modi-asked-print-media-owners-editors-refrain-negative-covid-coverage>

⁷ J.W. Dearing and E.M. Rogers, *Agenda-setting*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996).

Part I

Pre-Covid India and Media

The media-prescribed view of reality around pandemic needs to be investigated in order to ascertain the levels to which it shapes the prevailing consciousness among the public. The idea of social imaginary, “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows” is an important analytical tool to study the institution of media as an ideological apparatus of the state.⁸ The idea was borrowed from Anderson’s idea of ‘the imagined communities’. Social imaginaries help us understand constructed reality since imagination itself has become an organized field of social practice in the cultural realm.⁹

While the pre-covid India can be characterized by slowing economy, persistent agrarian crisis, record level of joblessness and declining labour force participation rate,¹⁰ much of the mainstream media that enjoys high TRP rates and state patronage, either turned a blind eye or diluted the gravity of the situation for its viewers. In other words, we were in disastrous circumstances even before the outbreak of the pandemic. TRP-driven Media garnered public support for the ruling governments that promised an idea of *vikas*(rhetoric of development), which also slowly dismantled critical public infrastructure over time, such as public distribution systems, public education, healthcare and essential transport necessary to save us from misfortunes such as these. In other words, the discrepancies and fragilities of the pre-covid India haunted India under the lock down. While the rich has had the resources to insulate themselves from such risks, the rest of the society struggled to survive and cope up. The common masses in India are experiencing a pandemic of this scale for the first time and the

⁸ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, (USA: Duke University Press, 2003), 23.

⁹ A. Appadurai, *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Labor Force Participation rate is an indication of the number of people in working age looking for jobs.

abrupt decision to impose lockdown has not given them, especially the most vulnerable among them, the time to absorb the shock and prepare for it. Clearly, pandemic affected different sections of our population differently, often depending upon the social location they belong.

The domineering news channels in India—especially the pro-government ones—boasted about daily updates concerning the pandemic, often with more aggression and drama under the lockdown. The pressure to make the news industry survive by keeping the viewers' attention intact, galvanized their anchors to stage dramatic expositions that are nothing but dangerous insinuations. The way it incarcerated activists and students during prime time, popularly known as 'media trials' resonates the evolving mediascapes in India. Such an imposture goes unregulated as it serves the interest of the government and suits the post-truth society that has developed a general disregard for truth. The following section discusses the kind of notable changes that the world of news media in India underwent and their consequences for society.

How do we make sense of press freedom in India? India's ranking in the Press Freedom Index has only gotten worse every year with frequent arrests of journalists, police violations and increasing pressure for the media houses to toe the line of the Hindu nationalist agenda.¹¹ The report also speaks about orchestrated social media hate campaigns against journalists in the country and the invoking of section 124a to charge sedition cases against journalists.¹²

Corporate-driven

What has led to this selective and profit-driven news reporting that is constantly in fear of the ruling order? Media houses are now controlled by major corporate houses engendering free and fair journalism in the country.¹³ P. Sainath, a senior journalist and

¹¹ World Press Freedom Index 2020.

¹² World Press Freedom Index 2020.

¹³ V. Parthasarathi, & A. Srinivas, "Problematic ownership patterns: the evolution of the television distribution networks in India," *Economic & Political Weekly* 54,

the founder-editor of People's Archive for Rural India (PARI), observed that the mainstream media platforms such as National News channels in India might be politically free but are imprisoned by profits.¹⁴ Dependence on corporate and government-provided advertisement for revenue is central to news media and their deliberate reluctance and shying away from discussing the plight of people that puts the ruling dispensation in poor light.

The menace of fake news

Sixty-nine percent of Indians surveyed, mostly youngsters of the age group 18-25, fell prey to fake news during the lockdown as per a study by Social Media Matters and Institute for Governance, Policies and Politics—conducted recently.¹⁵ Of which, 88.41 per cent were spread via WhatsApp and Facebook and 70 per cent of the consumers did not even report that as fake news. From an independent ideologically-neutral entity to one of propaganda machinery, media (both print and TV) have undergone major shifts. New media provided novel platforms to inform and misinform, and to create, distort and share news events, forging the narrative to suit the ideology of one's vested interest or appeal to the beliefs held.

Post-truth politics is understood as a phenomenon where debates are framed largely by appealing to the affective realms that is rooted in one's identity and sentiments, often disconnected or deviated from truth and reason. The new media of the digital sphere fall victim to such fake news. It is used as a propaganda tool by politicians for the scale of its reach and degree to which it shapes public opinion. These technologies were frequently employed by

12(2019). Retrieved August 15 <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/television-networks-political-ownership-patterns>

¹⁴ P. Sainath, "Politically Free, Imprisoned by Profit", 22nd Safdar Hashmi Memorial Lecture, 2016, *Newsclick*. Retrieved May, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nq-bBDw2r-Y> (Part 1) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz-WcPY9FAI> (Part 2)

¹⁵ See Tanurima Mitra, "Surveys on Fake News in the Times of Covid-19", *Social Media Matters*, 13th August, 2020. Retrieved August 15, 2020 from <https://www.socialmediamatters.in/surveys-on-fake-news-in-the-times-of-covid-19>

IT wings established by major political parties to control narrative and public opinion. Facts are muddled when they are unfavorable and sometimes even doctored or fabricated to produce desired effects. The tendency for hero-worship and the unquestionable status granted to the populist leaders also characterizes the post-truth phenomenon.

Part II

Covid-19 and Media

The section is based on reports on media and advertisements in India during lockdown. Television advertisements volume have increased by around 12 per cent during unlock periods (15–21 Aug 2020 and 11–17 April 2020) compared to the pre-covid volumes, according to a BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) India and Nielson report 2020. Top 10 advertisers inventory rose to 34 per cent during the unlock period compared to the pre-covid times. There has also been consistent rise in the advertisers and brands being advertised after May 2020.¹⁶ With the return of original programmes, their advertisers also returned during the unlock weeks. Advertisement volumes increased especially for FMCG (Fast-moving Consumer Goods), E-commerce and educational goods. The report also indicated, different genres were back to pre-covid levels (Jan-Feb 2020) and Ad views for news during prime time and movie time also saw a spike.¹⁷ Advertisement volumes in television saw a 6 per cent rise in June to August 2020 as against the same period last year, according to data released by AdEx India 2020.¹⁸ The crucial role advertisements play in connecting the viewer-consumers with the products during Covid times make it an essential part of our discussion as that traps us into a capitalist worldview.

¹⁶ BARC India and Nielson Report 2020, 44.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Financial Express (Sept 2, 2020). Advertisement on television rose 44% in August when compared to June'20: TAM AdEx India 2020. <https://www.financialexpress.com/brandwagon/advertisement-on-television-rose-44-in-august-when-compared-to-june20-tam-adex/2072201/>

The commodified nature of TV news can be inferred simply from how they have been attractively packaged for the viewers.¹⁹ The transition of both—news media and television content—to serve the populist imaginations and aspirations happened mainly due to their dependence on advertisement revenues. Primetime on TV continues to be the most preferred slots for advertisers.²⁰ Advertisements during the covid-19 crisis tell us how the imagination of the pandemic is absorbed and appropriated into the dominant sense of reality that existed pre-covid. How were products marketed during the Covid-19 world?

Product marketing and promotion largely were based on misguided notion of scientificity. That some of the FMCG goods including sanitation products promised that 99.99% germs get killed. Needless to say, that they rode on the fear psychosis of the masses to sell their products. Vicks candies could kill germs, Facemasks became a fashion product, Dominoes promised safe distance delivery of Pizzas and E-commerce became the order of the day. Products and services were aiming to be 'covid-proof' to urge consumption. Not that they do not benefit the customers but beneath the marketing prudence lays a sheer opportunistic persuasion that appeals to 'the consumer-self'. The amount of immunity-boosting products that are in the market and how the older brands modified their products or just their taglines to suit the viral times, is an example of how television aids our transmission into the post-covid world without much resentment.

The 12 weeks during the lockdown have shown record TV viewership, 22 per cent higher, compared to the pre-covid levels with a 7 per cent higher Daily Average Reach.²¹ Among the 307 million people who watched TV all 7 days a week, 68 million more people were added compared to the pre-covid levels (239 million). Total TV Consumption increased by 43 percent during

¹⁹ M. Chaudhuri, *Refashioning India: Gender, Media, and a Transformed Public Discourse*, (Orient BlackSwan, 2017).

²⁰ See, AdEx India 2020; BARC India and Nielson 2020.

²¹ BARC India and Nielson 2020, 5.

the peak period (Week starting March 28 2020) over Pre-Covid levels. While television and advertisements have actively pushed consumption levels during covid times, governments used them to manage their political image. Around 163 million people watched the Ayodhya Temple Bhumi Puja live.²²The table below illustrates the widespread coverage of Prime Minister's address during the lockdown announcements and the power of television media in arbitrating this process of consent manufacturing among the governed.

²² Ibid, 37.

Table 1: Prime Ministers' Addresses to the Nation and its Television Coverage

PM's Address to the Nation	Date	Channels	Duration (Approx. in mins)	No. of People who viewed the telecast (in Mn)	Viewing Minutes (Mn)
1 st address/Janta curfew	19th Mar 2020	192	30	83	1275
2 nd address/21 days Lockdown	24th Mar 2020	201	30	197	3863
3 rd address/Video Message	3rd Apr 2020	199	11	119	1025
4 th address/Lockdown 2.0	14th Apr 2020	199	25	203	3922
5 th address	12th May 2020	198	33	193	4250
6 th address	30th June 2020	199	16	42	442
Address to Jawans at Leh	3rd July 2020	179	27	29.2	313
Independence Day event	15th August 2020	195	152	133	4641

Source: BARC India and Nielson 2020, 11th Edition: p36

Part III

Television Advertisements and Consumption during Covid-19

Michael J Sandel, in his book, *What Money Cannot Buy?* asked how do we keep markets from encroaching our lives during times when everything is for sale?²³ The moral limits of market that are often easily blurred by corporate brands in a society marked by conspicuous consumption often results in the invasion of our lives. The glamorous and appealing nature of the advertisements and their repetitive telecasting not only promotes consumption but also nudges us into a consumerist worldview. In such a view, it is okay to see everything as a product as long as it satisfies a certain need: from FMCGs to education (e-admissions and online classes) and healthcare, everything is for sale. There is a giant advertisement industry that helps do just that. The power that these dominant brands have with their ability to influence and control our lives cannot be overlooked. Since schools and colleges were asked to function online, many EduTech companies also used this crisis as an opportunity to raise their revenue.

Thanks to television advertisements, education has become a complete marketable commodity or a commercial service that relies on promotion. During lockdown EduTech companies organized a full-blown commercial campaign for online education and digital certification to open up the market for higher education in India. CoVid-19 has provided these platforms an excellent opportunity to proactively push for app-based educational products and services. India has over 3000+ EduTech companies—the creamy layer of them all have high profile investors and their combined finance capital would certainly want to build a massive consumer base. Since March—when the first lockdown was imposed—BYJUs has added 6 million students to its digital learning platform²⁴ and raised

²³ M.J. Sandel, "What money can't buy: The moral limits of markets," (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

²⁴ S.H. Salman, "Fresh funding round values Byju's at \$10.5 billion," *Livemint*, August 5, 2020. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from <https://www.livemint.com/companies/start-ups/fresh-funding-round-values-byju-s-at-10-5-billion-11596594521922.html>

around US\$ 545 million. The daily-fed advertisements to viewers with such ideas were a result of such investments.

Table 2: Notable Edu-Tech Investments during Covid-19 in India

Company	Raised	From
BYJUs	US\$545 million	Bond Capital, General Atlantic and Tiger Global, DST Global
Unacademy	US\$ 110 million	Facebook and General Atlantic
Univariety	US\$ 1.1 million	Info Edge
Classplus	US\$ 9 million	RTP Global et al
White Hat Jr.	US\$ 300 million	Bought by BYJUs

Source: Livemint and Business Standard 2020; Business Insider Sep 2, 2020.

Both sports and cinema celebrities, as brand ambassadors advance consumerism. In one such advertisement, two famous cricket stars were asking us to download a gaming app²⁵ – Mobile Premier League aka MPL – so that unemployed youngsters can earn cash prizes by playing the game online.²⁶ Can we expect celebrities to understand the seriousness of the country’s unemployment crisis?

Here is a snippet of the job losses during April and May. The total unemployed youth grew from 9 million during 2011-12 to 25.1 million by 2017-18.²⁷ By 2018, more graduates (35.8%) and

²⁵ Mobile Premier League (2019, April). *Hero Bannahai? Toh MPL Khel Na - Cool Macha! Chrome Pictures Dir: Hemant Bhandari.* [Video Ad]. YouTube. Retrieved June 6, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU5jKwnZ6IE>

²⁶ Mobile Premier League, “Play Online with MPL - Office Ad - Mobile Premier League,” 2019. Retrieved from YouTube on June 6, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a38kP9YR4AY>

²⁷ S. Mehrotr& J.K. Parida, “India’s employment crisis: rising education levels and falling non-agricultural job growth”, *Center of Sustainable Employment*, Azim Premji University, 2019.

postgraduates (36.2%) were unemployed. By March 2020, the total employment figure fell to 396 million (2% drop) from its average 404 million during 2019–2020. This also fell to 144 million by April 2020 (30% drop) according to Consumer Pyramids Household Survey. Companies have already communicated their decisions over cuts in salary and even job layoffs. The bottom of the pyramid – wage labourers, migrant workers, contract staff – were the worst affected. However, their stories were either not adequately carried by much of the national media nor were they given the weightage required – when covered.

Naomi Klein, a journalist-turned researcher termed this disaster capitalism. Klein has reported from disaster zones in US to warn us how corporate firms find ways to profit from the disaster. Her shock doctrine to portend how authorities and industrialists use ‘public’s disorientation following a collective shock – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes or natural disasters – to push through radical pro-corporate measures, often called ‘shock therapy’.²⁸ Through facial recognition technology and drone technology, the way the current government actively rallied to create a police state with surveillance mechanisms imposed down its citizens during crisis, indicate the truth of Klein’s assertion.

When the outbreak of the pandemic devastated the lives of the poor, the pro-government sections of the media constantly kept the people distracted. 68 thousand crores of defaults were written off by the government, various activists were arrested under the draconian UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act), dissenters and student protestors were also being jailed exposing them to the risk of infections. Migrant laborers died on their way home after walking several miles and the National Education Policy 2020 bill was passed at a time when students attempting suicides have risen due to the inaccessibility of online classes. Given the enchanting hold that television has upon its viewers – in suggesting that this crisis is a temporary inconvenience – an absence of outrage among the masses comes as no surprise. Pandemic-like situations throw new challenges to a weakening democracy like India. How can

²⁸ See, N. Klein, *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*, (USA: Macmillan, 2007).

one effectively dissent or protest against the government while in isolation? How do we ensure its effective response to the disaster or safeguard our rights when it pounces upon us? How does one remain sensitive during crisis amidst callous commercialism?

During the pandemic, the public, as subjects of governance, internalize the crisis and prepare to accept tough measures imposed upon them. John Dewey's book, *The public and its Problems* tend to validate Foucault's perspective that the ideals such as democracy envisaged by the modernity need not be rosy. It suffers from its own demerits. The strength of a democratic society lies in its people who have the power to elect their representatives to power. However, without a well-informed citizenship who can critically assess the social conditions and base their decisions on truth, they cannot assemble and organize consciously to modify the system to work for them; the purpose of democracy therefore remains unachieved leading to saturation and paralysis. To quote Dewey, "the new age of human relationships has no political agencies worthy of it. The democratic public is still inchoate and unorganized."²⁹ This disorientation has to be seen in the light of media consumption as a social practice.

Part IV

Debating the Media market

India acts as an important market because of its consuming middle class and that makes it second largest online markets in the world. Around 600 million internet users constitute 50 % internet penetration rate in the country by 2020 (as against 4 per cent in 2007), most of who are below 29 years of age who use mobile phones to access.³⁰ There are more than 300 million Facebook users in India.³¹The increase in internet penetration and accessibility also

²⁹ J. Dewey, *Public & its Problems*, (USA: Penn State Press, 1954), 303.

³⁰ See, S. Keelery, "Internet Usage in India- Statistics & Facts," July 7,2020. Retrieved August 5, 2020 from <https://www.statista.com/topics/2157/internet-usage-in-india/>

³¹ See, Statista, August 3, 2020. Retrieved August 5,2020 from [ttps://www.statista.com](https://www.statista.com).
Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, XI(2020) 2: 13-32

makes it a reliable marketplace.

New media emerged with the production of digitized contents online that gradually reached masses as widely as the smartphones reached Indian households. Indian market was 16 per cent of the global market share for smart phones by 2019. This was a sharp rise from 9 per cent in 2016.³² Internet penetration has also expanded to cover more population, especially the urban and the rural middle class into a web of digital communities. The phenomenon of digital sphere helped citizens mobilize against corruption and rape culture in the beginning of the decade culminating in marked political changes in the country. Social media acted as a powerful platform wherein the middle class youngsters could voice their views. The performance of the 'public' as active citizens, although largely dominated by the middle class,³³ often is extended to social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The sphere here is virtual and digital. News become tweets and vice versa. The embedded nature of television media and social media, therefore needs to be looked at as a whole as they depend on each other to shape public opinion in recent times.

Prabhat Patnaik (2002) observed in a convocation speech at *Asian College of Journalism, Chennai*³⁴ that 'the moral universe of the media has shifted' because the people of this country have not only started tolerating but also actively consuming the kind of sensationalism that has become common in the media world. Consumers of the new media today, consisting largely of the middle class have not only stopped looking for verifiable facts but have started basing their decisions on falsehoods masquerading as truth. The preference for disinformation that confirms ones beliefs—over verified information—keeps the environment vulnerable to fake news.

com/statistics/255146/number-of-internet-users-in-india/ Aug 3, 2020

³² IBEF, "Export Of Mobile Phones From India: Over 100% Growth In Fy20" *India Brand Equity Foundation*, 2020. Retrieved July 30, 2020 from <https://www.ibef.org/blogs/export-of-mobile-phones-from-india-over-100-growth-in-fy20>

³³ M. Chaudhuri, "Indian media and its transformed public", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 44, 1-2(2010): 57-78.

³⁴ See Editor, "Market, Morals and the Media", *Frontline*, July 20, 2002. Retrieved August 17, 2020 from <https://frontline.thehindu.com/other/article30245622.ece>

P.Sainath points out that the shift in this moral universe is also driven by the material universe of the corporate ownership. The might of the popular media driven by TRP rates is the might of the capital. The media corporations, with its marketing muscle and advertisement revenue, depend on the citizen-consumers and hence target them. The nexus between the political elites and the media elites has roots in the merging of the voter and the viewer. This interbreeding of the consuming citizens as both the voter and the viewer brings together the state and the market forces to defend and support each other.

Now, television media has gone digital and social media has also found its place in news reporting. The embedded nature of both is significant as TV media captures the housebound audience, the digitization of which carries the same to the mobile users. Did this not only compress time and space for instant reporting but also provided for a 24*7 hold on the citizens as subjects of governance by the state? To keep them constantly on the loop is to establish modes of producing a self that is fashioned in favor of the state and the business class.

The numbing effect produced by the tragedy and the uncritical consumption of news create disorientation. Mazzarella urges us to go beyond the standard opposition between liberal-progressive view based on impersonal ethics and the conservative-populist view based on the intimate realm.³⁵ On one side, there is a class of young citizenry regularly engaging and discussing on social media platforms. And, there is another set of citizens that consume television contents daily without much revulsion. This is not to say the public are not anguished of the injustice that occurs around them. These issues find place in the media and are being discussed and debated at times. Comments were also being shared across social media platforms along with the contents. Opinions of the public figures were being re-tweeted and shared widely. Both veneration and criticisms have found a place in the media sphere. However, whether it produced any nuanced debates around the issue, balance

³⁵ W. Mazzarella, "Sense out of sense: Notes on the affect/ethics impasse", *Cultural Anthropology* 32, 2(2017): 199–208.

of perspectives or possibility for dialogic communication between the citizens and the state during the lockdown is to be seriously doubted.

Media, both TV and digital screens, became a battleground for ideologies, where a brute display of power is broadcasted daily and the citizen-consumers-as viewers and as users, choose which side they belong to.³⁶ The need to subject the information to scrutiny and to arrive at truth is being disregarded in order to prove a point and win – whereas constructive criticism and meaningful analysis is limited only to a small section, the ‘aware’ civil society. Alternative Media that gains popularity among the elite sections of the civil society does thrive in the same digital sphere, yet they struggle to reach to the masses.

Consumption is the central social action that defines the citizen-consumers in India. The unquestioning self of a citizen-consumer is a product manufactured by the state and the media, financed by big capital. The objective is to produce citizen-consumers that are merely complying and hero-worshipping political subjects. Television Media in India plays a central role in social conditioning of the citizenry. It controls through a process of careful selection, censoring and framing to shape their understanding of the world. The dissemination of ideas through careful framing, television aids in the transfer of the ruling ideas of our times, especially when controlled by state and market agents. Thus, successfully passing over the dominant patterns of ‘normalcy’ of the pre-covid era into the post-covid world.

Conclusion

Television Media played a significant role not only in providing news about Covid-19 but also in shaping the public consciousness during that time. Pandemic coverage was certainly a priority for several news channels, however the framing and packaging of the

³⁶ See, Chaudhuri, “*Mass Media*,” Consortium for Educational Communication, University Grants Commission of India, June 14, 2018. Retrieved July 28, 2020 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FsBfEAT1GI>

arguments and the way government response and policies were passed over without adequate discussions and criticisms makes them a hand-in-glove partner in upholding the ideology of the state and market forces, as they increasingly are embedded within these institutions. The ruling dispensation, the TRP-driven Media and the corporate brands could successfully fashion an uncritical yet passively consuming and disoriented self – because it could not comprehend the disruptive changes that is unfolding; yet distraught by the daily reports of death and despondency. People were made to internalize the unprecedented and extraordinary nature of the crisis and were getting gradually primed and prepared for the tough measures to come, all through the medium of television. For news and entertainment, television remains the top option as it covers around 780 million of the population in India.

The year 2020 is momentous to Indian Democracy for it brought out the shadow side of its population and polity, Covid-19 is only a catalyst. This is a rare moment in history where the pandemic and its consequences have even reached the remote areas in the country. It has forced us to reflect on our social life. The mass consumption of fear, anxiety and the tragedy that unfolded enforced upon us an idea of new normal. This idea is state-scripted, media produced and represented a simulated version of the reality that produced a distraught self. It primed the citizen-subjects to be prepared for the tough changes, those which may not be otherwise acceptable during the pre-covid times. It is grooming us to accept the new reality brought about by the pandemic and tolerate state action, however unacceptable it might seem in a constitutional democracy.

While the daily reports of death statistics and official announcements gave a false sense of transparency, the degree to which information is controlled by state agencies narrates a scenario otherwise. Media is a crucial ideological apparatus that linked the state agencies and the business class in connecting with the citizen-consumers and keeping them engaged, such that the politically influential middle class remains unagitated. The theatrics of the State requires a stage; television is the only widespread device that can provide for an audio-visual medium of that scale.

Indian workers in Dubai: City, Fear and Belongingness

Abhijit Ray

Even though the pandemic is portrayed in the popular narrative as a collective experience of humankind, it affected different sections of people of different spectrums in different ways across the world. The workers from India and other south Asian countries are living in the megacities like Dubai in the Gulf region for generations. The outbreak of the pandemic suddenly shattered the economic arrangement of the workers carefully designed by the host and home countries over the decades. The article has mainly focused on two contradictory human experiences— belongingness and fear in the context of Indian workers working in Dubai during the pandemic. In this particular time, the eagerness for ‘going back home’ was driven by these two seemingly contradictory human emotions. The focus is entirely on Dubai— which is considered by many Indians as an extended part of India. The article points out that the pandemic magnified certain aspects of the workers working in Dubai that often remain invisible in the popular public domain. The pandemic suddenly exposed the vulnerability of the workers living in foreign cities. There are chances that the pandemic experience will have a long-lasting impact on the life of the workers and the whole economic and political arrangement of the city like Dubai.

Keywords: Fear, Dubai, belongingness, pandemic, lockdown, laborers.

Introduction

The exodus of Indian migrant workers from the cities of India during the Covid-19 pandemic ‘lockdown’ caused a public uproar, fear, pain, empathy and anger at the same time. The fear and the insecurities of the workers were suddenly revealed and became visible to the public eye. A large section of Indian workers is also working in foreign cities— particularly in the Middle East or the Gulf region. Their existential situation is as vulnerable as the workers of the home country— even though it may be argued that the nature of the vulnerability differs between these two categories of migrant

workers. Mainly economic factors encouraged the mass migration of labourers to the Gulf region from India, but it's a temporary arrangement for them. The state narrative of the host countries defines them as 'outsiders'. Social and political acceptance is never possible for an 'outsider'. The culture of fear and suspicion for each other never encourage a sense of belongingness and comfort. However, the vulnerability, the fear and the insecurities of the Indian workers in the foreign land did not appear prominently in the public view during the pandemic. So, the paper is an effort to focus on the certain emotional and intuitive human experience of a section of people that remained invisible during the pandemic. The study focuses on the workers of Dubai – the city which is often considered as an 'extended part of India'¹ in the Arab world by many. Human emotions – like fear and the feeling of belongingness are discussed in the paper in the context of the city and the Indian workers to explore the collective psyche of the migrant labourers during the pandemic. It assumes that the pandemic situation has magnified some of the hidden factors connecting the Indian working class in foreign cities. Indian workers in the Gulf region are great contributors to the economy of the country, but their issues are often ignored and remain invisible from the popular public domain.

Working in Dubai

The Gulf region is highly dependent on migrant labourers. The number of migrants from South Asian countries is pre-dominant in the entire Gulf region. They are working in different sectors. The number of Indian workers is visibly dominant in countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia or Qatar. India is the largest suppliers of the labour force in the UAE.² Dubai is a major city of UAE, and the number of Indians working in Dubai is predominant. According to estimates, before the Covid-19 pandemic, 17.5 million Indians were

¹ David Sancho, "Exposed to Dubai: education and belonging among young Indian residents in the Gulf", *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18, 3(2020): 277-289.

² Arabinda Acharya, "COVID-19: A Testing Time for UAE-India Relations? A Perspective from Abu Dhabi", *Strategic Analysis* 44, 3(2020): 259-268.

living in UAE³ and a majority of them were concentrated in Dubai. Approximately, 51 per cent of the total population of Dubai was from India.⁴ The Emirati citizens constituted just 15 percent of the total population of the city.⁵

Dubai has been an important destination for Indians for centuries. According to Andrew Gardner, there were three phases of Indian migration in Dubai.⁶ The Indian merchant class was in Dubai before the British rule in India. During the colonial rule, Dubai was the western entrepôt to the Indian mainland.⁷ So, historically Indians maintained a close tie with Dubai. A lot of Indians lived in Dubai before it actually became an international business hub. However, the mass inflow of Indian workers started in Dubai during the 1960s⁸ and 1970s.⁹ The oil economy boom and the expansion of real estate caused the demand for labourers in the entire Gulf region. Workers from the neighbouring Arab countries also migrated to Dubai in that period. However, the Dubai authority was suspicious about the Arab workers for the rise of Arab nationalism¹⁰ and the consequent movements. So, they shifted their concentration to the South Asian region seeking cheap labour from the region. Cultural and religious proximity was one of the reasons for selecting South

³ Sharmila Dhal, "Indians largest group of expats in UAE", *Gulf News*, Dubai, 18 September 2019. <https://gulfnews.com/uae/indians-largest-group-of-expats-in-uae-1.66500784>

⁴ Data collected from World Population Review Website Link: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/dubai-population>

⁵ World Population Review Website Data, Link: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/dubai-population>

⁶ Christiane Schlote, "Writing Dubai: Indian labour migrants and taxi topographies", *South Asian Diaspora* 6, 1 (2014): 33-46.

⁷ Arabinda Acharya, "COVID-19: A Testing Time for UAE-India Relations? A Perspective from Abu Dhabi", *Strategic Analysis* 44, 3(2020): 259-268.

⁸ Christiane Schlote, "Writing Dubai: Indian labour migrants and taxi topographies", *South Asian Diaspora* 6, 1 (2014): 33-46, 35.

⁹ Arabinda Acharya, "COVID-19: A Testing Time for UAE-India Relations? A Perspective from Abu Dhabi", *Strategic Analysis* 44, 3(2020): 259-268

¹⁰ Idil Akinci, "Culture in the 'politics of identity': conceptions of national identity and citizenship among second generation non-Gulf Arab migrants in Dubai", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, 11 (2019): 1-17, 2.

Asian labourers—particularly—religion was a prime factor for selecting South Asian labourers.¹¹ Like the other economic aspects of the city, the authority of Dubai is very concern, selective and calculative about the laborers working in the city.

Future vs. Futuristic

The rulers of Dubai successfully planned and prepared to secure their economy for the future during the oil economy boom. They were aware of their limited oil reserve. So, they invested their oil money in different sectors and diversified the economy. Currently, only 2 per cent (approximately) of the GDP of Dubai comes from oil, and the rest comes from non-oil sectors.¹²

The popular quote from Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, “[m]y grandfather rode a camel, my father rode a camel, I drive a Mercedes, my son drives a Land Rover, his son will drive a Land Rover, but his son will ride a camel”¹³ explicates a concern connected with the ‘future’ of the city. The futuristic approach of the rulers of the city is visible everywhere in Dubai. In this context, Kathiravelu mentioned about an ‘air-conditioned bus stand’ in Dubai.¹⁴ The air-conditioned bus stand is the ‘first air-conditioned bus stand in the world’ and it’s a statement regarding the city underlined by this ‘futuristic approach’. Dubai is often termed as a ‘futuristic’ city. Dubai is a ‘dream world’ for the neoliberal economy. It’s a tax-free ‘heaven’ for business. The architecture of the city also carries the

¹¹ Christiane Schlote, “Writing Dubai: Indian labour migrants and taxi topographies”, *South Asian Diaspora* 6, 1 (2014): 33-46, 35.

¹² Anthony DiPaola, “Dubai Gets 2% GDP From Oil After Diversifying Revenue Sources”, *Bloomberg News*, New York, 28 September 2010. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-09-28/dubai-gets-2-gdp-from-oil-after-diversifying-revenue-prospectus-shows>

¹³ Varsha John, “Youth must pay heed to our leader’s advice”, *The National*, Abu Dhabi, 12 March 2017. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/opinion/youth-must-pay-heed-to-our-leader-s-advice-1.62743>

¹⁴ Laavanya Kathiravelu, *Migrant Dubai: Low Wage Workers and the Construction of a Global City*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 43.

vibe of the futuristic approach. Benjamin Smith even predicted that eventually, Dubai might be the collective future of everyone.¹⁵

However, the futuristic 'vision' of the city is not appreciable for many. Mark Davis strongly expressed his scepticism regarding the 'futuristic' characteristic of the city.¹⁶ The 'futuristic' Dubai is not desirable but scary for him.

The recent pandemic and the worldwide lockdown, in another way, support the sceptical view regarding the 'futuristic enthusiasm'. The unpredictability and the catastrophic crisis caused by the pandemic is a question mark for the over-enthusiasm for 'being futuristic'. The pandemic crisis indicate that the 'futuristic' is just an adjective to define a particular dimension of 'present'. The 'future' is, like always been, unpredictable and unknown.

The 'futuristic imagination' inspired not only the city but also the migration to the city from different parts of the world. People from different corners of the world, including India, migrated to Dubai in search of a 'better future'. In this context, Akbar Ahmed wrote about the Pakistani experience:

The saying Dubai *Chalo*, "let us go to Dubai" - which is the equivalent of the expression "Westward ho" in Western tradition, has become part of Pakistani culture (popular Pakistani films around this theme are "Dubai Chalo" in Urdu and "Visa Dubai da" - "visa for Dubai" - in Punjabi. It signifies the possibility of gathering relatively quick, legitimate, and a great deal of wealth in the Arab states.¹⁷

This Pakistani phenomenon is also applicable to other parts of the South Asian countries, including India. The 'possibility' of a brighter 'future' is so dominant that it covers up the defensive psyche of fear and other insecurities. However, the pandemic and the lockdown suddenly opened Pandora's Box. The pressure of

¹⁵ Benjamin Smith, "Scared by, of, in, and for Dubai", *Social & Cultural Geography* 11, 3 (2010): 263-283, 264.

¹⁶ Ibid, 264.

¹⁷ Akbar S. Ahmed, "Dubai chalo: Problems in the ethnic encounter between Middle Eastern and South Asian Muslim societies", *Asian Affairs* 15, 3(1984): 262-276.

‘closed doors’ opened up the suppressed emotions and insecurities covered up for years.

To Belong

The idea of ‘belongingness’ may convey a very subjective and complex emotional meaning at the psychological level. It might be an absurd concept. However, the dominant liberal notion of the contemporary political scenario defines belongingness in terms of citizenship, cultural assimilation and equal rights.¹⁸In every aspect, the idea of belongingness among the class of migrant workers in Dubai is either superficial or absent most of the time.

The cosmopolitanism of Dubai is very unique. Multiple ethnic, linguistic, religious and ‘racial’ groups are living ‘together’ in the city for decades. Multiculturalism is a defining characteristic of the city from a macro perspective. However, multiculturalism in Dubai is just an economic arrangement. Many migrant workers from India and other South Asian countries are working in the city for generations. But, they cannot expect to become a citizen of the country. The citizenship for an ‘outsider’ is near to impossible for the ‘futuristic’ city – Dubai. The authority is tolerant towards different cultures until they maintain the ‘distance’. Cultural ‘co-existence’ for economic purposes is acceptable for the city, but cultural assimilation is fanatically restricted by the authority. The authority is very successful for creating a space that separates the ‘other’ from the ‘owners’ of the city. The ‘other’ can fulfill their economic necessities without proper physical and cultural assimilation. As Julian Bolleter explained:

Dubai has successfully created spaces for diverging cultural groups without requiring significant assimilation. The separation of ethnic groups along economic lines while allowing for a ‘functioning’ multicultural society, also creates conditions in which segments of

¹⁸ Idil Akinci, “Culture in the ‘politics of identity’: conceptions of national identity and citizenship among second generation non-Gulf Arab migrants in Dubai”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46,11 (2019): 1-17, 2.

the society become 'othered' when viewed from the perspective of the dominant strata of Dubai society.¹⁹

They have formulated certain legal procedures from the tribal tradition of the region just to keep away the 'other' from the natural process of political and cultural assimilation. The *Kafala* system is still prevalent in the Gulf region. The *Kafala* system is a 'sponsorship' system of labourers and it started in the Arab region during the 1950s to support the working force of the booming economy of the region.²⁰ ILO (International Labor Organization) explains the *Kafala* system in the following way:

Under the *Kafala* system, a migrant worker's immigration status is legally bound to an individual employer or sponsor (*kafeel*) for their contract period. The migrant worker cannot enter the country, transfer employment nor leave the country for any reason without first obtaining explicit written permission from the *kafeel*...This situates the migrant worker as completely dependent upon their *kafeel* for their livelihood and residency.²¹

ILO further pointed out that the *Kafala* system is designed to restrict the workers from providing citizenship. It is a system that assists the authority to get the workforce without obligations. ILO mentioned, "The *Kafala* system serves a social purpose by emphasizing the temporary nature of a migrant workers presence in the country, so that even if the worker is present for a long time s/he doesn't acquire the rights of citizenship."²²

The fear of 'outsiders' plays a major role in the psyche of the 'authenticcitizens' of the city. The Emirati citizens are outnumbered by the 'outsiders' in Dubai. They (Emirati citizens) are the minority in the city. So, maintaining or preserving the Emirati heritage is a

¹⁹ Julian Bolleter, "Charting the Potential of Landscape Urbanism in Dubai", *Landscape Research* 40, 5(2015): 621-642, 629-623.

²⁰ ILO (International Labour Organisation).Link:<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/docs/132/PB2.pdf>

²¹ Ibid.

²² ILO (International Labour Organisation).Link:<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/docs/132/PB2.pdf>

great concern for both the authority and the citizens of UAE as well as Dubai. The Emirati authority asserts a very flipping definition of authenticity and belongingness. Both the authority and the permanent citizens of the country emphasize this authenticity to justify the privileged status quo of the permanent citizens. So, the 'authenticity of citizen' is a crucial issue in the entire country. The authenticity of Emirati national identity is defined in terms of citizenship in Dubai.²³ Citizenship is again "premised on shared ancestry, kinship and descent among those who are in possession of Emirati passports: Bedouin, tribal and Arab."²⁴ According to Akinci the authority has created this narrative of 'authenticity' to assert the popular belief that the migration is a recent post-oil phenomenon, and before the migration, it was a 'homogeneous nation'.²⁵ Emphasizing on the narrative of 'authentic citizens' the authority has successfully created the 'other'. The narrative of 'other' is visible in every aspect of political, economic, cultural, social and even infrastructural spectrum. There are different layers and conditions of making the 'other' in the city. In this context, Akbar S. Ahmed wrote about the Pakistani experience in Dubai. Unlike Indians, Pakistanis do not belong to a different religion. So for the Pakistanis living in Dubai ethnicity is the main determining factor. He wrote, "[a]s Islam is not the issue – both groups being Muslims of the same sect, Sunni – ethnicity becomes important in definitions within and between the groups. This is further exacerbated by the employer-employee nature of the relationship."²⁶

Like some other parts of the Gulf region, the citizens of Dubai proudly wear their national dress '*Disdasha*' (men's dress) and '*Abaya*' (women's dress). IdilAkinci pointed out, "these 'national dress' is a recent 'invention'. Scholars argue that Gulf national

²³ IdilAkinci, "Culture in the 'politics of identity': conceptions of national identity and citizenship among second generation non-Gulf Arab migrants in Dubai", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, 11 (2019): 1-17, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁶ Akbar S. Ahmed, "Dubai chalo: Problems in the ethnic encounter between Middle Eastern and South Asian Muslim societies", *Asian Affairs* 15, 3(1984): 262-276.

dress, which derived from the *Najdi* (i.e. Bedouin) culture, is one of the main 'invented traditions' of the newly established Gulf States and plays an important role in the construction and maintenance of an imagined community based on an Arab and Bedouin heritage."²⁷

The UAE authority collected a selective part of the past and 're-engineered' it for fulfilling the current political and economic aspects. They carefully selected the 'orientalist' narrative about their past. They project a 'romanticized' version of the orientalist narrative about their identity to create an 'imagined community' and the category of an 'other'. Akinchi further added, "Performing national identity through everyday acts and embodiment of national symbols, such as national dress, by individuals is crucial in the way boundaries of national identity demarcated and its insiders/outsiders are evaluated."²⁸

These national dresses are exclusively used by the Emirati citizen and by some other Arabs. It provides the 'visibility' of the 'imagined community'. It also facilitates the authority and the 'imagined community members' to distinguish 'the other'. The 'national dress' is a powerful statement against the 'feeling of belongingness' of the 'outsiders'. It makes them aware of their 'otherness'. It says that they are not belonging to that particular politically defined space or territory. The psychological impact of visibility is very strong. Boundaries and borders are crafted and maintained very efficiently in different spectrums of the city. This cultural and political production of the city underlines a conscious effort of depriving the 'other' of the 'feeling of belongingness'.

The education system of Dubai and the involvement of Indians in that education system says a lot about the feeling of 'belongingness' of Indians in the city as well as other parts of the Gulf region. Indians are one of the prominent consumers of the education system in Dubai. Many schools in Dubai offer Indian curriculum and many

²⁷ Idil Akinci, "Culture in the 'politics of identity': conceptions of national identity and citizenship among second generation non-Gulf Arab migrants in Dubai", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, 11 (2019): 1-17.

²⁸ Ibid, 2.

Indians are education entrepreneurs in Dubai. A major section of the Indians prefers Indian curriculum in Dubai for their children. According to them, it would be good for them when they need to go back to India.²⁹ This particular phenomenon clearly shows the insecurity of the Indians living in Dubai—their consciousness of political vulnerability.

However, the wealthy Indians living in Dubai often express a different feeling regarding the belongingness. Economic comfort provides them with a sense of security in the city. This sense of security is strong enough to temporarily forget about political and cultural vulnerability. David Sancho wrote about the experience of wealthy Indians in Dubai:

...their access to wealthy relatives, friends, and other cultural and social resources; and the abundance of Indian media (digital, radio, newspapers, and TV channels) and daily flights connecting the UAE and India produced a sense that Indians and Indian culture were a constitutive element of Dubai, and that Dubai is a part of India. For many of them, in fact, the boundaries between India and Dubai would often times become blurred.³⁰

According to him for many wealthy Indians, Dubai is just an 'extended part' of India. The accessibility of family and cultural elements makes it possible to feel 'a superficial sense of belongingness' despite the political unacceptability. The consumerist culture of the city is so strong that it dominates other aspects of human experience. David pointed out, "[t]hrough consumption migrants are able to achieve an image of themselves as belonging and being part of the Gulf even though they cannot belong as formal citizens."³¹

For many Indians living in the city "Dubai was in many ways very Indian."³² Most of them live in very close circles of the same

²⁹ David Sancho, "Exposed to Dubai: education and belonging among young Indian residents in the Gulf", *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18, 3(2020): 277-289.

³⁰ David Sancho, "Exposed to Dubai: education and belonging among young Indian residents in the Gulf", *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18, 3(2020): 277-289.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

ethnicity. Their day to day interaction is limited to their fellow countryman. This closed environment often helps them to forget about their home country. However, the pandemic was a reminder of the existing vulnerability even for the wealthy class of the city. The pandemic instantly triggered the insecurities forgotten in the midst of the ultra-consumerist culture of Dubai. The insecurities even increased the community feeling among Indians from the different class spectrum. Many workers were living on the street and dependent on the food provided by the Indian community groups during the pandemic and lockdown period.³³

The community-based institutions are very common in Dubai. These community-based institutions are helpful for the members of the community. It provides them with a feeling of 'security' in the land where they don't 'belong'. Elsheshtawy pointed out that different community in the city "maintain strict segregatory measures, by having their own set of institutions which enable them to maintain their cultural values."³⁴ This arrangement also helps the authority to maintain the segregation among the different ethnic groups. The visible cultural distinctness not only enables to maintain the difference among the community but also to be comfortable about it.

Fear, Inside-Out

Fear is an internal feeling caused by some external entity. Yi-Fu Tuan discussed the 'landscape' as the external entity for causing fear. He elaborately discussed the 'city landscape' as the source of fear in his book *Landscapes of Fear*. According to Tuan, human being imagined heaven as an epitome of order and earth as chaos; so by imposing order everywhere in the city human being try to imitate heaven.³⁵

³³ Devaki Vadakepat Menon & Vanaja Menon Vadakepat, "Migration and reverse migration: Gulf-Malayalees' perceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic", *South Asian Diaspora*, (2020): 1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1820668>

³⁴ Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Redrawing boundaries: Dubai, an emerging global city" In Yasser Elsheshtawy (ed.), *Planning Middle Eastern cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 169-198.

³⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscape of Fear*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 145.

Force is necessary to maintain the 'orderly' structure of the city and 'outsiders' are often considered as a threat to the orderly structure of the city. Tuan said:

...perfect physical and social order rarely lasted anywhere more than a few decades. Its existence depended on force – the stringent application of rules to regulate human behavior. The use of force, however, was ineffective. Too much of it killed the life of the city and reduced it to a mere ceremonial center of splendid monuments. Too little, and a capital would continue to attract swarms of people engaged in economic and commercial activities, whose presence inevitably disrupted the idealized order.³⁶

This idea of Tuan can explain the current scenario of Dubai. The authority of the city is too much concerned about the 'orderly' functioning of the city. They are also much concerned about promoting the 'orderly' aspect of 'their territory'. The architectures, monument, shopping malls, and skyscrapers are a proud display of the 'heavenly order' of the city. However, the flow of economic labourers is a visible 'threat' for the orderly structure of Dubai – both for the authority and the citizens.

They (foreign workers) are considered as a 'threat' to their privileged 'orderly' structure. This 'fear' towards outsiders is clearly visible in the state's rules and regulations. They are very much concern about maintaining 'otherness'. The multiculturalism is tolerable under strict rule and surveillance, but assimilation of the 'outsider' is forbidden for maintaining the orderly structure of the city. So, the feeling of belongingness is also prohibited for the 'outsiders' living in the city.

Even the city infrastructure can cause 'fear'. According to Tuan its effect can be 'frightening'.³⁷ He wrote, "...every street and building – and indeed all the bricks and stone blocks in them – are

³⁶ Ibid, 146.

³⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscape of Fear*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 146.

clearly the products of planning and thought, the final result may be a vast, disorderly labyrinth."³⁸

The city authority considers the labourers and all the immigrants as a 'threat' and even the infrastructure of the city are frightening. So, in such a situation a sudden outbreak of pandemic and lockdown is capable of creating a horrific experience in the mass level among the workers.

Dubai is a highly segregated city on the basis of class, race and ethnicity. Artificial homogeneity is created within the city just to attract a certain class. The city has created multiple 'gates' to segregate different sections. Laavanya Kathiravelu, in her book 'Migrant Dubai: Low Wage Workers and the Construction of a Global City' mentioned about the 'gated communities' of Dubai. She wrote:

The middle-class gated enclaves and working-class labour camps of Dubai are obviously different spaces. One caters to a skilled expatriate population who demand standards of comfort, privacy and living found in high-income Western states. The other is typically relegated to the edges of the city, and houses the masses of cheap workers who build, clean and service the booming emirate. The gates in the former are primarily to keep undesirables out. In the latter, they keep workers in.³⁹

The segregation is clear and unapologetic in the everyday life of the city. However, the segregation is not always visible; because, most of the spatial studies about the city are top-down studies, and are not that of everyday experience.⁴⁰ Most of the studies of 'spaces in Dubai' are 'macro scale and top-down analyses'.⁴¹ The macro-level

³⁸ Ibid, 147.

³⁹ Laavanya Kathiravelu, *Migrant Dubai: Low Wage Workers and the Construction of a Global City*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 134.

⁴⁰ Mattias Junemo, "'Let's build a palm island!': playfulness in complex times", In Mimi Sheller and John Urry (eds.) *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*, (London: Routledge, 2004) 181-191.

⁴¹ Laavanya Kathiravelu, *Migrant Dubai: Low Wage Workers and the Construction of a Global City*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 135.

top-down analysis or architectural perspective of space dominates, since “much of the emirate’s global visibility has been linked with the rapid change in its skyline and cityscape in the last decade.”⁴² However, the study of everyday life and experience explores some other dimensions of the city. Exclusion is a part of everyday spatial experience in Dubai.

The middle and upper class ‘gated’ residential areas were created to keep them safe from the threat of ‘other’. The ‘other’ – poor ‘non-white’ and ‘non-Arab’ working class are also ‘gated’ in certain ghettos. Their “movement in and out is monitored by a guard at the gate, and logged in a register.”⁴³

Fear for the ‘other’ is the primary concern of the ‘gated communities’. In the post-modern narrative, multi-ethnic city aspires to be inclusive, but ‘gated’ development only promotes ‘fear’ for the ‘other’.⁴⁴ However, the ‘gated’ development or ‘safety’ of the city is normalized in Dubai and it is often ‘marketed’ as a desirable ‘element’. Kathiravelu explained, “Enclaved living is perceived as normal or right within particular social milieux, part of the middle-class migrant habitus. In taking privatized segregation to be the norm, strategies of disaffiliation and exclusion are seen to be “natural” elements of the urban landscape and city life.”⁴⁵

Dubai has created ‘gated safe space’ for rich white homogeneous ethnic groups segregating them from the ‘other’. The ‘other’ is predominantly South Asian labourers. The rich white ‘gated space’ is an aspiration for middle-class South Asians. The ‘gates’ plays a major role in creating the ‘other’. It symbolizes the ‘alienation’ of the other. Even in the ‘gated safe space’, the feeling of belongingness is rare, but a sense of fear and loneliness is prominent. Belongingness comes from a community feeling, but “in the gated enclaves,

⁴² Ibid, 135.

⁴³ Ibid, 140.

⁴⁴ Teresa P. R. Caldeira, “Fortified Enclaves: The New Urban Segregation”, In James Holston (ed.) *Cities and Citizenship* (London: Duke University, 1999), 303-328.

⁴⁵ Laavanya Kathiravelu, *Migrant Dubai: Low Wage Workers and the Construction of a Global City*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 143.

social networks around neighbourliness are not easily formed, and friendships are more made often along lines of nationality and language.”⁴⁶

The ‘culture of fear’ exists in Dubai, but by creating ‘gates’ and forcing ‘exclusivity’ they have created a ‘visibly desirable’ ‘safe space’. The ‘safe space’ is desirable for the people and they can afford it by spending money. As Kathiravelu observed:

...in Dubai it (culture of fear) manifests more as a cultural fear of the classed “Other”, invading and disrupting the order and aesthetics of middle-class spaces. Safety and security are thus more performed than enforced with any rigidity in gated developments in Dubai. It is the semblance of exclusivity and safety that exists.⁴⁷

So, according to Kathiravelu, ‘performance of security’ in Dubai ‘can be seen as part of the larger construction of exclusivity and class’.⁴⁸ The exclusion of the working labour class is so important for the city that they (labourers) are forced to be invisible. They are a threat to the ‘aesthetic norms’ of Dubai. So they are forced to occupy the hidden spaces of the city.⁴⁹ Kathiravelu mentioned, “[g]aining access into labour camps in Dubai is difficult, as most of them are behind walls or barbed-wire fences and have a security guard at the door determining who enters and exits.”⁵⁰ Most of the labour camps are located outside the ‘developed’ areas of the city and they are not even visible from the highways.⁵¹ The culture of fear and segregation already existed in the city before the pandemic. The characteristic of post-pandemic world is still unpredictable, but the ‘pandemic experience’ might be a justification for promoting and normalizing the culture of fear and segregation in different spectrum of city life in near future.

⁴⁶ Laavanya Kathiravelu, *Migrant Dubai: Low Wage Workers and the Construction of a Global City*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 146.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 147.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 148.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 148.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 149.

⁵¹ Ibid, 150.

The Pandemic

During the pandemic, the fate of the migrant labourers was highlighted in different media reports and commentaries. Many workers within the country started their 'homecoming' journey from different cities on foot. This was an embarrassment for the government and the country. The same fate was faced by migrant workers abroad. However, in the initial phase—the 'limited and selective' evacuation of the migrant workers by the government from different countries was covered by the media in a 'heroic' way. India started *Vande Bharat* Mission to bring back its citizens to its home country.⁵² The initiative of the government was appreciated. However, with the increase in the number of Covid-19 patients, people started to criticize the initiative. Many people pointed out that the inflow of NRIs is one of the reasons for the increasing number of infection.⁵³

The sufferings of the migrant workers in the Middle Eastern countries were not visible like the sufferings of the workers of domestic cities. The mental sufferings and insecurities of the workers working abroad were ignored in the chaos of the home state. Many Indians working abroad did not get their salary and lost their job.⁵⁴ *The Hindu* published a report about the workers in the Gulf region. According to the report many workers from the region had to return without months of salary owed to them.⁵⁵ The report mentioned it as "wage theft—non-payment for overtime, denying workers their last pay check after he or she leaves a job, not paying for all of the hours worked, not paying minimum wages—is a trend

⁵² Arabinda Acharya, "COVID-19: A Testing Time for UAE-India Relations? A Perspective from Abu Dhabi", *Strategic Analysis* 44, 3(2020): 259-268.

⁵³ Devaki Vadakepat Menon & Vanaja Menon Vadakepat, "Migration and reverse migration: Gulf-Malayalees' perceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic", *South Asian Diaspora*, (2020): 1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1820668>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Rejimon Kuttappan, "Indian migrant workers in Gulf countries are returning home without months of salary owed to them", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, 19 September 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/society/indian-migrant-workers-in-gulf-countries-are-returning-home-without-months-of-salary-owed-to-them/article32639165.ece>

that often goes unreported.”⁵⁶ A BBC report also mentioned about the pathetic condition of the Indian workers in Dubai.⁵⁷ According to the report, the workers did not get their salary for the ongoing pandemic and they were facing problem to afford shelter and food. They were completely dependent on charity organizations. Some of them did not even have enough money to afford a return ticket and quarantine facilities. They were in a vulnerable situation in foreign countries. The following statement explains the situation of Indians workers in UAE and Dubai: “Indian expats currently find themselves in a no-man’s land with the virus keeping them at bay in the United Arab Emirates. As an ordeal to NRIs and other residents, the spread of Covid-19 has compelled preparation for an unforeseen shift from a globalized to localised lifestyle...”⁵⁸

The workers were in a helpless situation.⁵⁹ So, they desperately wanted to come back to India. Menon and Vadakepat called the process as ‘reversed migration’.⁶⁰ However, the ‘reverse migration’ is not appreciable for the home country. The post-pandemic situation is a serious issue of concern in India in the context of the workers working in Dubai and other parts of the Gulf region. The economy of Dubai is not dependent on oil anymore and its retail, tourism and real estate sector suffered the most because of Covid-19 situation.⁶¹ So, the economic impact of the city will be severe. According to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce, 70 per cent of business in UAE will be closed because of the worldwide lockdowns.⁶² So, around 150,000 Indians were preparing to leave the country.⁶³ The negative growth rate and focus on ‘Emiratization’

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Sameer Hashmi, “Coronavirus leaves Gulf migrant workers stranded”, *BBC News*, Dubai, 15 May 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-52655131>

⁵⁸ Devaki Vadakepat Menon & Vanaja Menon Vadakepat, “Migration and reverse migration: Gulf-Malayalees’ perceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic”, *South Asian Diaspora*, (2020): 1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1820668>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

is already predicted by many sources.⁶⁴ According to a study, more than 80 per cent of workers were talking about their preparation to leave the country.⁶⁵ The study also mentioned the 'Emiratisation' process of the country. This process will further reduce the demand for Indian workers in Dubai. Many parts of the Gulf region have already started planning to reduce the dependency on foreign workers.⁶⁶ The pandemic situation will further encourage them to do so. For example, Kuwait's National Assembly approved a draft bill in July 2020 to reduce the number of foreign workers. It will affect India. The bill will allow evicting 'between 800,000 and 1.45 million workers'.⁶⁷ It's a catastrophe. India was already going through a lot of economic issues before the starting of the pandemic, and according to the World Bank '12 million Indians could be driven into destitution by coronavirus'.⁶⁸ Indian migrant workers helped the economy of both the host country and home country.⁶⁹ Asian Development Bank predicted that the remittances could fall up to 23.5 per cent for India in 2020.⁷⁰ Apart from the state authority's concern, the workers are also anxious about their 'future'. The economic aspect was not the only concern of the migrants working abroad. The 'NRI status' helped them to gain "some personal values such as self-esteem, achievements, and recognition in their family and society."⁷¹ According to estimation, 1 in 7 Indians affected by

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Rupert Stone, "COVID-19 in South Asia: Mirror and Catalyst", *Asian Affairs* 51, 3(2020):542-568.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ DevakiVadakepatMenon&VanajaMenonVadakepat, "Migration and reverse migration: Gulf-Malayalees' perceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic", *South Asian Diaspora*, (2020): 1-21<https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1820668>

⁷⁰ RupertStone, "COVID-19 in South Asia: Mirror and Catalyst", *Asian Affairs* 51, 3(2020): 542-568.

⁷¹ DevakiVadakepatMenon&VanajaMenonVadakepat, "Migration and reverse migration: Gulf-Malayalees' perceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic", *South Asian Diaspora*, (2020): 1-21<https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2020.1820668>

mental disorder in 2017, and the situation will be worst during the pandemic because of the mental stress and economic uncertainty.⁷²

The workers were panicked 'outside' the country; however, 'inside' the country – the surrounding is not again supportive. The context of 'outside' and 'inside' space has changed in the pandemic time. TejaswiniNiranjana wrote:

In the space-time of our collective modernity, dating back over two hundred years, we had come to define the "outside" as the space of individual freedom, mobility and recognition. In pandemic time, the outside becomes the space of threat, so we now exist in the outside by smalling up, masking, flinching, shrinking. The "inside," for those living alone or with just one other person, and those privileged by class, has been a space of safety and comfort in these perilous months...⁷³

The transnational migrant workers were exposed in an 'outside' space. They were not 'inside' the home country. The psychological trauma caused by the 'inside-outside' narrative was widespread. In the initial phase of pandemic, many Pakistani students in China posted videos on social media platform requesting the Government to bring them back to Pakistan. Instead of their repeated appeal, the Pakistani Government made it clear that the students would remain safe in China – as Pakistan lacks proper medical facilities. Not only Pakistan but the whole South Asian region, including India, has been vulnerable to the coronavirus pandemic. After Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia is the second poorest region in the world.⁷⁴ The whole South Asia region has a very weak healthcare system and India spends only 3.53 per cent of its GDP on healthcare.⁷⁵ The people living outside are quite aware of the vulnerability. But the 'outside' narrative was so powerful that many of them ignored the

⁷² RupertStone, "COVID-19 in South Asia: Mirror and Catalyst", *Asian Affairs* 51, 3(2020): 542-568.

⁷³ Tejaswini, Niranjana, "Pandemic musings in inter-Asia", *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 21, 3(2020): 476-481.

⁷⁴ RupertStone, "COVID-19 in South Asia: Mirror and Catalyst", *Asian Affairs* 51, 3(2020): 542-568.

⁷⁵ RupertStone, "COVID-19 in South Asia: Mirror and Catalyst", *Asian Affairs* 51, 3(2020): 542-568.

vulnerability of the homecountry. The insecurities that the workers were carrying in their everyday life made the 'outside' narrative more prominent. The pandemic situation was a mirror that shows the deficiencies of the country.⁷⁶ This mirror also reflects the 'inside' insecurities, vulnerabilities and fear of the workers working in cities like Dubai. They were never belonging to that city, and they carried the fear somewhere inside their 'heart' all the timewhile being 'outside' the country.

Conclusion

The 'Dubai model' of modern cityscape is visually seductive; and the 'voyeurism' often dilutes the attention from some primary aspects of city narrative- like, human experience and emotions of belongingness or fear in the everyday life of the city. The Indian workers are deprived of the 'feeling of belongingness' for generations in the city where they live. The host country and the home country are normalizing it for their economic purposes. The city has also nourished and normalized a 'culture of fear' for each other (between 'locals' and the 'other') over the years. The Covid-19 pandemic suddenly caused a 'collective emotional breakdown' when the workers tried to open up for a moment. However, the chaos of the home country and the management of 'orderly city' made their voices insignificant. The pandemic has suddenly exposed multiple evidences of human sufferings in different layers. The emotional status of workers in foreign cities like Dubai is one of them. A closer and empathic approach is necessary towards this aspect of migrant workers before the evidences are getting blurred in the midst of post-pandemic 'economic priorities'. An 'iceberg' should not be ignored before moving towards the 'futuristic journey' of a city or a country.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

BEFRIENDING THE BROKEN BODY

Understanding the Post-Pandemic Body

Soroj Mullick

The paper approaches the impact the pandemic has had on innumerable human bodies, with a philosophico-theological reflection, building on the biblical insights into the human body and the changes it has undergone within Christian tradition. The paper asserts that the notion of perfection on which the Christian ideals of sanctity was created over the centuries have had its negative impact in delimiting the sin dimension of being human, to the body, and in the body, to the sexual. The contemporary issues of gendered body, sexual orientation and identity, seeking expressions across the globe within the western modernity and its aftermath in the rest of the world, through the colonial expansionism needs a critique and the pandemic does a cleansing not only of the physical world but also of the inner psychic world of the post-pandemic human is what the paper delineate.

Keywords: Sexuality, gendered body, sin, pandemic, spirituality.

Introduction

What does it mean to be human being with bodies—as living and thinking bodies? What is new in the awareness of the body, in the current pandemic times? What relation does it have with the life in the Spirit? How to free oneself from the cult of the body? These questions leave us perplexed. The body has been, for centuries, the subject of suspect and ambiguity. In this background, certain reflections are pertinent during this viral time.

There has always been a ‘Christian’ desire to overcome the body which is an expression of vulnerability and the limitations of our will. It is not just a recent tendency—as a result of the modern technologies—but has been in existence long before the present epoch of technological transcendence. The wish to overcome the conditions of the body is also a wish for total freedom, which is a utopia. Are we thinking of replacing the body with other hardware

(*Sophia* with Artificial Intelligence)¹ for this total freedom? In a highly technological society, the body will increasingly become a burdensome attachment.

However, one thing has become clearer. The body has—simultaneously—become an important theme of reflection and spirituality. The body (theology of the body) and practices relating to the body constitutes major themes of current discussions—but are often destructive. We need, therefore, an accurate perception of what is happening to the body, to have a clear understanding of the contemporary, global reality; and to make a critical study of the biblical elements—of a way of thinking bound up with the body and with the idea of incarnation—not to negate the body, but to love it. Because of the utopia of the perfect body inherent in all our modern cures, it is necessary to grapple with the image and myths existing around the understanding of the body. A good life need not necessarily be identified with the immortality of one's own gene. The corporality—the body has values of its own as it is by no means just a physiological entity—but has been constituted culturally.

Starting with the evolutionary narrative of the body, this paper attempts to address its diverse dimensions, and implications. It proposes spiritual reading in the context of the contemporary global reality and also the idea of an incarnational cosmic body. The Christian understanding of sin has shamed the body in various ways. This suffering, colonized, conditioned, mixed, yet a resilient body, continues to challenge theology of the body and its spirituality. An integrated and renewed body and mind, with a cosmic-consciousness in the midst of the pandemic, is a sure way towards a fulfilled and healthy living.

¹ *Sophia*, a social humanoid robot developed by Hong Kong-based company *Hanson Robotics*, was first turned on 14th February 2016. Her first public appearance was at South by Southwest Festival (SXSW) in mid-March 2016 in Austin, Texas, United States.

I

Social Implications of the Globalized Body

Being the Natural Body

The body is probably the only psychophysical entity in the world, which can be guided directly by consciousness and through that, we have a direct access to the world. The body is constantly present, and is expressed in moods and dispositions which accompany the content of our consciousness. Our bodily capacities, the sensuality, are the condition of all knowledge. The provocation of the senses stimulates, gives pleasure and leads to the satisfaction of sensual tendencies. This pressure is exercised in unconscious reflexes or drives. It is an expression of one's individuality, occupying a concrete place in space and time through which we achieve an orientation and position. There are advantages in seeing, hearing, touching and tasting which are articulated through different bodily modes. The body itself is the first expression of culture and the very language has a bodily disposition.

The body functions as a boundary. It is directly bound up with human psyche and habits and at the same time is the medium which associates one with what the self is not. It is the vehicle of being in the world and through it one identifies himself/herself with certain futuristic plans. The body is the first medium which relates to the world. Interpersonal relationship takes place in an area of vision, of hearing, of sensing and of touching. There is a direct involvement of persons by bodily contact and interaction. However, through writing, social media and other means of verbal and external means of communication, there is a tendency to make body superficial. The body becomes an object to be shaped, something that which is attached to a person but is no longer a psychophysical entity.

Speaking about the renaissance of the body, Regina Ammicht Quinn of University of Tübingen, argues that the "body, which today has come back into the centre of interest, does not speak what is expected of it and hoped from it: the language of truth,

authenticity and naturalness.”² The body is no longer a place which can be ‘occupied’ by religion clearly and without loss – any more than the cosmos and society are. This is certainly not for Christianity, because hers is a history of guilt. Today, ‘both pillars of theology, God and human beings’ seem to be shaky foundations. What is our role, therefore, to make sure that man and woman live truly with his/her body in its fullness?

Is there not a risk of dismembering the body, with the consequent loss of the universal sense of the body? Is it not dangerous to have obsessive attention to one’s own body at the cost of breaching relationship with others? The body is the subject, not only of touch and vision, but of all our actions and passions. When it is being created (born), it distinguishes itself from the mother and becomes the object of care, of love; it comes in interaction with other bodies and ultimately realizes itself.

Can I say I am my Body? Or I have my body? Can I reflect on myself, taking this body as an object? My body lives the adventure of being born, of growing and weakening, of eating, of coming in contact with others, of loving and of dying. My story, my desires, joys and sorrows, hopes and waiting, delusions, victories and failures are all inscribed in my body.

The body as “flesh”, is negatively perceived in its own limitations making it the place of defence and aggression. Nevertheless, today we are more conscious that we have our body forgetting that it also has a spirit. It is then that the body speaks and confers dignity to the physical presence. It does not speak only with words but also through its very being. How to live this body? What about the words not spoken by the body but which is innate in itself? If we don’t understand what it does not speak, we will destroy the body making it an absolute idol, a total emptiness to which to sacrifice one’s life. The human being, in fact, becomes the interpretation that one gives to one’s body.

² Regina Ammicht-Quinn and Elsa Tamez (eds), *The body and religion*, (SCM Press, 2002), 7.

An Isolated and Self-Cultivated Globalized Body

The Body is understood in the Cartesian philosophy as a machine, the functioning of which is ultimately to be derived from mechanical interactions. It was only on the basis of this notion of the body that modern scientific disciplines could emerge, including modern medicine. What happens to/in this body is recognized through access from outside. We not only think of the body in this term but many of us live it too. This has found its way deep into forms of life and cultural practices, in ways of dealing with sickness and health, in attitudes to physical work, in spheres like cosmetics and sport and even in the legal regulations. This view is a globalized one, and not just European or Western. The idea of the body got materialized in various corners of the world through dissemination of the Western science, medicine, industry and technology – through the modern means of communication.

A globalized body is isolated from connections with its environment and from social and biographical contexts and thus allows causes and effects to be directed. Thus we have an approach to the body under the eye of the physician (in the present context – Covid hospitals, isolation, under ventilators are reminiscent of that gaze) or the natural scientist. Body is understood as an instrument and is treated accordingly. This attitude has led to a very widespread direction of bodily functions in everyday life: fitness training, treating one's own body for high achievement, the compulsion for discipline – and the appearance of the body became an essential part of the self in representing it through cosmetics, dresses, and jewellery. A combination of fashion with fitness techniques has established the objectivistic concept of the body in the sphere of beauty. In all of these remains the tendency to treat the body merely as an instrument.

In contrast, with the understanding of body as a subjective given, as the nature that we ourselves are, there came about sexual reforms, reforms in food and clothing and naturist culture. The idea of being natural became the leading idea around 1900s. Today, in an age of

globalisation bodies are no longer limited historically or culturally. The practice of self-cultivation, the Yoga, the martial arts, different forms of alternative medicines (and herbal immunity boosters!) will also represent a counterbalance to the globalisation of Western concept of the body in other parts of the world. In dominant Western traditions the very concept of body has been formed in opposition to mind. It is defined as the place of biological data, of the material, of the immanent. It has been conceptualised as that which marks the boundaries between the interior self and the external world.

It is appropriate to stress that women's bodies are not only recognized and venerated for their reproductive capacity, but that they are also subjects of desire. The body, abode of delights and pleasures, the dual body of women and men, is the principle of being on earth, in fusion with the immediate surrounding and with the origin of the cosmos. This idea can be caught in the remnants of epic poetry, songs, narratives and metaphors in various cultures and languages. Even these vestiges can begin to reveal incarnate universes that escape the Western master narrative of spirit over flesh.

Body: Commodity and Pleasure

What is attractive in the short term may run counter to what is best in the long run and persons may go astray ignoring warnings. Human beings considered either as individuals or as collective bodies, do not follow their best interest always. This is relevant for understanding the body in one's personal life and interpreting larger body movements through the human evolution. When an activity is necessary for sustaining life and guaranteeing its continuation, it is one of nature's methods to make it pleasurable. It is instructive to note how people respond, positively or negatively, to body's natural signals. Think of the attraction of one body towards another, opposite to it. The normal human being responds to this attraction positively. This pleasure finding act is accepted as something worth cultivating for its own sake even beyond what is necessary for sustaining healthy body and vitality. However,

the signs are clear that this search for pleasure has overstepped the limits in utter defiance of nature's signals. How people die of diseases from overeating (Wuhan wet market as the starting point of Corona spread)³, from over pleasure seeking and merrymaking. Our commercial civilization has produced the idea of the "economic man" to do duty for the whole man, considered it rational to accept pleasure as the basic goal of life and concluded that purchasable commodities are the principal avenues for attaining that goal. When this pleasure seeking is accepted as the basis of life, it has a strong subterranean hold on our psyche.

A pleasure giving body loses its capacity to yield positive pleasure as we come to have more and more of it. The possessiveness of one's body is not particularly productive of happiness or lasting pleasure. Here pleasure stands for something more passing and unsteady, while happiness is steadier and closer to a state of peace and equilibrium. This happiness comes from union of bodies. Pleasure is derived from gratification of the senses. It belongs to a world where the feeling of separateness dominates, while happiness stresses on the 'other' as opportunities for one's self-realization through an expansive sympathy. The very nature of the body has the principle of pleasure. It is, therefore, a question of orientation.

Body: Behaviour and Social Interactions

The post-pandemic persons' social skills in physically interacting with others, especially those who stays a prolonged period in isolation, will suffer from a negative impact. Lack of such interactions leads to negative cognitive, emotional and physiological effects. Separated from society—thanks to the pandemic induced social isolation—can make one impulsive, awkward and intolerant,

³ Chinese virologist Dr Li-Meng Yan differed from the above theory and has claimed that the novel coronavirus was made in a government controlled laboratory in Wuhan and that Sars-CoV-2, a "high mutant virus" neither originated from Wuhan seafood market, nor from nature. Cf. *Hindustan times*, 14 September 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/covid-19-made-in-wuhan-lab-controlled-by-china-govt-claims-virologist-offers-evidence/story-JJTyD7Ts61FLOzPvEQHHQL.html>, 15.9.2020

losing one's facility and agility in social behaviour and movements.⁴ Physical longing to be with others in times of isolation is a normal biological signal that one has to be accustomed to. It's an odd social malaise with biological reasons, though not a pathology or mental disorder.⁵ Even the introverted self can suffer a mortal threat. Physical interaction gives a sense of belonging, as a part of a wider community. According to Stefan Hofmann, a professor of psychology at Boston University, social isolation breaks that security and disables one to respond to the social subtleties in life. As we live with the lethal Corona virus, we become more self-conscious of the risk, and feel uncomfortable with other people, thus we try to avoid, withdraw from the social. We cannot deny our dependence on the normal physical contact and interactions in words, gestures and expressions. Post-pandemic efforts must be to connect with others with confidence even when values and personalities might see some change.

II

Cosmic Body within the Colonized Global Reality

Shaming the Gifted Sexual Body

We experience in life the inner urge to meet the 'other': the body as the word not said, does not complete itself until it meets the 'other' half. It is not just the desire for physical completion but it is concerned with the total bodily human being in relation to the 'other'. In the Bible the body of man and of woman are created in God's image and likeness in as much as they are masculine and feminine (Gen 1:26-27). This strain continues in the "flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone" (Gen 2: 18-23), and 'that they be one body' (Gen 2:24).⁶ The man recognizes and discovers himself in the

⁴ Cf. Kate Murphy, *We're All Socially Awkward Now*, The New York Times, Sept. 1, 2020

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/01/sunday-review/coronavirus-socially-awkward.html>, 13.9.2020; See also, *Sunday Times of India*, 13 September 2020, p. 10.

⁵ Stephanie Cacioppo, the director of the Brain Dynamics Laboratory at the University of Chicago holds on to this theory.

⁶ Jean Vanier, the founder of the worldwide I'Arche communities, referring to these

light of the woman. The diversity of the sexes remain incomplete in itself and each defines itself in relation to the 'other'. There is no place for Narcissism. My Body is called to live in a different way, being the reflection of the glory of God, "the temple of God" (1 Cor 3:16).

The negative judgment on sex surfaced within Christianity in the search for perfection as a human experiment. The Fathers of the Church, considered the human person as a quasi-political entity within which the soul struggled against the body. St. Augustine deals with men's problems and dwells at length with how lust takes control of man, making sexual activity and the sexual organs shameful. He proceeds to pair this problem of sexual desire with that of sexual pleasure. This attribution of sin to sex became a fixation and infiltrated the whole culture. The sexual organs as evil or ugly derives from the traditional Christian association of sex with evil/sin. The link adversely affected healthy sexual relationships in such a way that what is actually experienced as pleasurable and attractive is paradoxically prohibited by religion as evil and ugly. This creates unnecessary tension between will and duty, and affects religion and religious people. People refrain from healthy relationships and engage in promiscuous sex in secret so as to 'steal' a pleasurable moment under cover as the occasion arises. By forbidding 'the fruit' one makes it more attractive. Nietzsche puts it thus: "Christianity gave Eros poison to drink - he didn't die from it, but he did degenerate, into a vice."⁷

Our sexuality is always three dimensional, including the body, soul and spirit. The body is affirmed and can join with the spirit in celebrating euphoric union, experiencing the transcendence, bliss or intense union, release and cleansing, wonder and the sense of mystery. One goes through a transforming and healing effects

bible references, writes on relationship between man and woman, with profound insight into the mystery of human sexuality, cf. Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He made Them*, (London: St. Paul Publications, 1985), 49-61.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche Internet Archive, 2003, 168-169. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/nietzsche/1886/beyond-good-evil/ch04.htm>, 18.9.2020.

that change ones understanding and behaviour resolving internal conflicts and relational discord, and enables one to live with empowerment and purpose-filled lives with meaning and direction. The after effects of the mystical experience reveals promotion of human functioning of the body in relation to self, others, and God. A personal integration is experienced.

Sexuality, is an energy at the disposition of everyone. It depends on how we use it. The body of man/woman is the connection between the necessity and the reasonable freedom. It is beyond the instinct. It is to live in the body to love. The beauty and the harmony of sexuality is an art to understand and accept.

Relating with prevailing Culture of the Body

The body, which can be attractive, can also be delicate. Many cultures do not allow enough human touching which is an essential element in health care. In short, the body defines me, my limitations. It is at the centre of my actions and thoughts. It puts me in contact with the "other". The mere fact that it occupies a space, I am limited. I am where my body is either in good health or in sicknesses. The body is ever restless and in constant search for its identity and survival. There is also certain *coincidence of the opposite effect*. It does everything and yet the body is not everything. It is just one entity. It was not before and will not be after; it knows what is beautiful and good; it also knows what is bad, ugly and harmful.

Man and woman, from the beginning have lived the limitations of the body as the 'place' of death than life, of defence and attack than acceptance, a narcissistic monotony than harmony with the other. It is considered, therefore, as the material condition of human being either "against" or "for" the 'other', around which the life of man/woman revolves. I know myself through the 'other' as a reflection on oneself. In the course of physical interaction between man and woman, pleasure consists in doing things either together or alone. All activities involve the body and one can discover an immense pleasure in just doing things and these activities can be promoted for the mere reasons of health.

The original culture of intimacy in which people received and offered pleasure in different bodily contacts such as embraces, strokes, looks, plays or simply being together to celebrate life, drink and eat together need to be enhanced as a variety of legitimate interaction. In interpersonal relationships, pleasure is much wider than excitement and it consists in doing things together within a shared space. Legitimate pleasures can set the body free from ailments. The body, its exterior liberation, liberation of its sensations, is at the centre of an 'imagined' culture. The body becomes a medium of marketization – a commodity, an idol.

We value the human body, celebrate beauty and life. When we come in contact with person rich in goodness, generosity, dedication, one who can pardon even before an apology, we consider a true beauty of goodness in it because it sheds joy, serenity, harmony and peace. More profoundly, we say that the spirit is the life of the body that goes on, goes forward; that which makes the body alive in the *now* moment; that which makes it what it is unconditionally, without excuses or being inexcusable.

Our body is the medium of relationship, and in today's pandemic language it (body as medium) itself is the message without which one cannot assert oneself in the world. In this connection, the body is essentially sexual and relational, because it is only through sexually identified relationships that human beings come to be, relate and prolong life. We have to face the present pandemic challenge that threatens to hamper and destroy this universal truth: humans are sexual and relational beings, and not just merely rational. A harmonious relationship between erotic pleasure and Christian morality is necessary so that God's creation can serve life. The doctrinal teachings and ethics are in favour of human maturity and they are centred and articulated upon 'responsibility'. We need to live effectively with a culture of the body in which the modern world is immersed.

A Suffering, Resisting and Resilient Body

The Asian Christian theology is 'body language, heart semantics or soul-syntax', that reclaims the body from the lived experiences. This is quite in contrast to the denigration of the body fed by the Church's tacit valorisation of asceticism and the spirit-body duality. It holds on the humanization of God in the body of Christ that suffers and resists. But the economy of 'signs', (eg. Faith and praxis towards the realization of a global community) served on human bodies especially on women bodies, sexuality and roles, has become distasteful. The body is a victim of negotiation within the intersection of gender, race, caste, class, cultures and religions. Bodies that suffer, bodies that resist constitute the life-blood, and fibre of Christian understanding.

One can think of the bodies (wo/men) that are pinioned by structural and systemic violence in various forms of oppressions. The bodies that suffer are those who experiences suffering not so much in theory but in praxis. Women's body as a lesser body forms the foundational premise of many of the misconception and practices—and hence sufferings. To realise the 'full divinity', as created in God's image—the premise on bodies that suffer—calls for the 'primacy of anthropological element over the ecclesiastical', 'critical over the dogmatic', and 'social over the personal'. An exegesis on the violence of bodies runs the risk of pathologizing bodies that suffer, inscribing such bodies (women) as weak, infirmed and violated. They are subjected to inferiorization, subjugation and victimization.

Within the daily cyclic phenomenon of creation, preservation and destruction, bodies that suffer also resist. They generate new ways of seeing which are grounded, specific and critical—to have control over and decide freely on matters related to their sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. It is the bodies that resist seamless categorizations within the plurality of identities in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious contexts. The voluntary starvation for the eroticisation of thinness as a beauty myth is the

present-day malice inflicted on human bodies. We are living in a period of broken body that suffers and resists for survival.

A Colonized, Conditioned and Mixed Body

At the beginning of the third millennium, as we think of our body, we are thus faced with an unavoidable reality: our corporeality has been relegated so often throughout the course of our life that it is difficult now to bring it out, to look at it, to concentrate on it. We experience our body, we suffer it, and we go through emotional agony felt within the body that holds the mind, without much attention—may be without even love. Our bodies are ignored or interfered with, subjected to pressure, to business and often humiliated. Bodies are not taken into account. There are policies that condition bodies so that the latter suit the former. The body is the external expression of its power. They are channels of life and show themselves, express themselves. But bodies lose its bearing in a commercialised setting.

The human body is not something outside history, but something that is developed, that we build up every day. How are we developing it today, on the margins of globalisation? Our body registers and carries with it the story of its development—the sorrows, humiliations, pleasures and joys. Our Asian bodies have the imprint of hatred and rebellion, fear and suffering—a fearful body, ashamed of itself and that hides itself and conceals. Yet, it is a seeking body that needs to discover itself and proclaim itself in order to achieve its identity and find its place in the society.

The laws, the state, politics, morality, the family, tradition, the Church have colonized the body. The man's body has colonized the woman's body. This has changed fashion, publicity, money, and seduction. We, therefore, are in search of ourselves but it is a complex process. We have reduced our bodies to biological, psychological, social processes since these human beings as bodies in relationship become enigmatic and mysterious, something that always remains to be explained. In an era of so-called globalisation, bodies begin to

see its reflection and its dreams in other bodies, which are not its 'other half' but an imposed presence.

In the process of inculturation, learning to experience one's body after the manner of borrowed bodies has become fundamental. A body is accepted, connected to the extent that it adjusts to what is required. We measure and calculate bodies. For example, the function of the models in fashions is not aesthetic, they are there to present not a beautiful body, but a body deformed in order to comply with a particular formal generality, that is to say a structure. So, by guaranteeing one way of living, dressing, or discovering and dreaming the body, the existence of a subjected and 'surrogated' body has always been assured.

III

A Renewed Body with Cosmic-Consciousness

Theology of the Body and its Spirituality

John Paul II through his *Theology of the Body* (1979-1984)⁸, clarifies the spousal meaning of the body in the context of the redemptive human suffering. He holds that the human body reveals God and contemplates the sexual complementarity of man and woman. According to [Christopher West](#), the central thesis of *Theology of the Body* is that "the body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus to be a sign of it."⁹ We are made in the image and likeness of God, and God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). So, we reflect God not simply in the spiritual part of who we are but who we are as masculine and feminine because our bodies as male and female reveal our call. George Weigel, John Paul II's biographer, in the context of the teaching of the spousal meaning of the body,

⁸ The Pontifical Institute for Studies of Marriage in the Family was started by John Paul II in 1982. See, John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Trans. by Michael Waldstein, (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

⁹ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, (Ascension Press 2004), 5.

called theology of the body as “one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries,”¹⁰ and called the body the ballast and the ship of the Church, some weight in its Hull that will keep it steady as it is going through some rough seas.

Each body is so radiantly unique that it makes one, his own self—what it really means to be male and female, with his/her identified gender.¹¹ The tendency to reject such identity has turned into a gender dysphoria, wherein persons struggle to identify with their own biological sex.

The body itself ‘speaks’ through its “masculinity and femininity. It speaks in the mysterious language of the personal gift.”¹² Therefore, the language of the body must always speak the truth. For example, according to John Paul II, the sacramental marriage “is manifested by the language of the body, a singular language of love originating in the heart.”¹³ The body is not merely an “organism of sexual reactions”. But it expresses the whole person, by means of the language of the body while “participating in the eternal plan of love.”¹⁴ In this context, the Christian understanding of the resurrection of the body brings about the fulfilment of the ultimate meaning of the body, where man and woman find the fullness of personal donation and communion of persons, through the glorification of his entire “being, (body & soul), in the eternal union with God.”¹⁵ Ultimately, the spiritualization of the body does not mean that the spirit dominates the body, but that it fully permeates

¹⁰ Cf. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, USA: Harper Perennial, 1999), 336–853.

¹¹ Facebook now offers its users more than 58 genders that they can pick from and in United Kingdom it is up to 71 genders. To see the list, Dennis Baron, Facebook multiplies genders but offers users the same three tired pronouns, Feb 28, 2014. <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/25/110232#:~:text=and%20they're%20free%20to,or%20them%20a%20happy%20birthday,20.9.2020>.

¹² John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, (Cheyenne, WY: Resurrection Publications, 2003), 9.

¹³ John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1984), 370.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 397.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 262.

the body. Consequently, “the resurrection will consist in the perfect participation of all that is physical in man in what is spiritual in him.”¹⁶

Self-Embodiment and Physical Experience of the Other

“What is being carved in human flesh is an image of the society.”¹⁷ For example, the notion of purity and impurity applied to the human body is extended to the society. This anthropological understanding of the body is useful in order to understand the Roman imperial construction of body.¹⁸ But, the body cannot be seen as merely the “biological raw material on which culture operates” or a “kind of vehicle for the expression of a reified social rationality.”¹⁹

Jesus healed the haemorrhaging woman and the daughter of a synagogue leader, Jairus (Mark 5:21-43), giving back their bodily dignity with its acceptance in the society. The philanthropic yet a phantasmic body of Jesus, walking on the sea and saying to the disciples, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid” (Mark 6:45-52), is an embodiment of a being manifested through Jesus’s body, which is broken and shared with others. It is a consumed body given in to the persistence of the other (a Gentile, Syrophoenician woman wanting her daughter to be healed) out of physical, emotional and spiritual need (Mark 7:24-30). Jesus’ was not a passive body. Physically as he went around, he noticed a great number of people were neglected, who needed his care and help, and that a random act of good deeds had to be done (e.g. “*Ephphatha*” Mantra to the deaf and dumb man, Mark 7:31-37).

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 241.

¹⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London: Routledge, 1966), 116.

¹⁸ Cf. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 76.

¹⁹ Thomas J. Csordas (ed), *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8; see also, Michael Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 123.

Certeau states, "It is the body that is responsible for a truth (of which it is unaware)."²⁰ According to Amos Yong, "God touches human bodies, restores human psyches, reconciles the psychosomatic dimensions of human life, and reconciles human beings"²¹ thus, revealing the saving work of the Spirit, which the embodied and somatic-sensory ministry of Jesus demonstrates. People wondered at Jesus' hand, and asked, "What deeds of power are being done by his hands?" (Mark 6:2). Cultural anthropologists speak of three modes of human beings: emotion-fused thought (eye-heart), self-expressive speech (mouth-ears), and purposeful action (hands-feet). Of these, the last outward human behaviour covers human actions upon the world of persons and things.²² Therefore, the abject body in Christian discourse challenges the social perspective, which denigrates some people as contaminated, 'untouchables', 'broken'²³ and unworthy because of their close association with the body's disgusting aspects. The physical bodily encounter by Jesus, is best characterized as contacts in action, i.e. taking (Mk 1:31; 5:41), raising (Mk 1:31; 9:27) and touching the sick by the hand (Mk 1:41; 7:33), and laying a hand upon the sick (Mk 5:23; 7:32). In fact, Jesus "placed his hands on every one of them and healed them all" (Lk 4:40). His mere physical presence and ordering voice healed many.²⁴ In addition, Jesus embraces children in his arms (Mk 9:36; 10:16), the human touch needed for their integral development. Besides, others have touched his body to be healed (Mk 3:10; 5:27-31). In short, the disfigured body, the female fragmented body "marked by the wound, the mutilation, or the scar" – historical traumas of a

²⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fables*, trans. Michael B. Smith, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5-8.

²¹ Amos Yong, "Many Tongues, Many Senses: Pentecost, the Body Politic, and the Redemption of Dis/Ability", *Pneuma* 31, 2 (2009): 167-88.

²² Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insight from Cultural Anthropology*, (Louisville, KY : Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 73-75.

²³ Jean Vanier speaks of the 'broken' body of humanity and the body of Christ, cf. Jean Vanier, *The Broken Body, Journey to wholeness*, (London: St. Paul Publications), 126-128.

²⁴ Jesus' physical presence and his rebuke to the fever, healed Peter's mother-in-law, who immediately got up and served the guests. Cf. Varghese Alengaden, *God in Flesh and Blood*, Vol. V, (Indore: Universal Solidarity Movement, 2007), 84.

person or community – are to be part of human concern and care. The body while it is socially constructed, functions as “an active and performing agent.”²⁵

Pandemic Implications of the Psyche on the Body

Man is made up of body, soul and spirit. The soul is the realm of self-consciousness and is composed of mind, emotions and will. The spirit is the realm of God-consciousness. The spirit of man is designed to be the place where God lives and reigns. Psychosomatic illness describes a bodily ailment that is caused by maladjustment due to mental or emotional problems. Between 70 and 90 percent of all the illnesses are psychosomatic. In the conscious stage, the body expresses what the soul tells it to do. This material body with soul and spirit is the person, in whom the spiritual faculties inhere. Every organism is composed of prime matter and substantial form (vital principle) that makes it exist as a material substance. Man is an organism – a living body, a sense organism and a rational animal with eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell, mouth/tongue to munch and taste, hands to feel and touch. It is the body that experiences the sickness, weakness, disease and pain, but they all affect the whole person (body, spirit and soul).

Today, this above understanding calls for a transformation, as Jesus intended by healing the whole person. According to Deepak Chopra, one of the eight ways of living the mystery of God-consciousness that Jesus visioned for others is: “The human body itself would be transformed, no longer beset with illness.”²⁶ In the earlier times the body was considered to be outside of human control and its illness was a punishment from God. But as St. Paul says: “When anyone is united to Christ there is a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17). Jesus, thus intended in universal terms, a new *creation* with

²⁵ Cf. Pamela B. June, *Fragmented Female Body and Identity: The Postmodern, Feminist and Multiethnic Writings of Toni Morrison, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Phyllis Alesia Perry, Gayl Jones, Emma Pérez, Paula Gunn Allen, and Kathy Acker*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 7–12.

²⁶ Deepak Chopra, *The Third Jesus: How to find truth and love in today's world*, (London: Rider, 2008), 16.

a renewed human existence, beyond the boundaries of dogmatic rituals and sacraments.

Integration of Body-Psyche for Healthy Living

Life is magnified in the body.²⁷ Life therefore, has to be regenerated in the body.²⁸ The unity of the person is gained through the integration of various aspects of the human presence, with proper control of the body through the psychic and spiritual activities. Physical movements, physical exercises, body-mind integrated Yoga, Celtic meditation in harmony with the nature, and sports, are the means to overcome the dichotomy of spirit and body. Walking and riding in freedom can also be a form of mysticism in addition to physical exercise.

We can help to gain a physical edge to be our best in daily living and learn strategies to improve physical health. Chronic illness or Corona-infect can bring both tremendous stress and distress in life, affecting both psychological and physical health. One gets sick from being stressed out. Recovering from a life-threatening illness, or learning how to live with a chronic disease, can take a toll on our mind and body. Studies show that the mind and body are strongly linked and they work together. As the mental health declines, the physical health can worsen. When the physical health declines, one feels mentally down. A positive outlook can help keep one healthy and improve the quality of everyday life by building resilience that helps to adapt to stress, and bounce back in life through strong emotional well-being, healthy relationships and an optimistic outlook. A positive confidence in self gives strength and ability to confront life's challenges by learning hard-earned skills in coping with life's situation. Psychotherapy or talking to friend/ someone who would listen, have shown to be effective in regaining behavioural health.²⁹

²⁷ Cf. Witness Lee, *The Knowledge of life*, (USA: Anaheim, 2003), 21.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁹ Cf. *For a Healthy Mind and Body*, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/topics/talk>, 12.9.2020.

Conclusion

The post-pandemic world needs a holistically healthy human society to live in. Benedict XVI spoke of a “holistic understanding of the health of society” with a duty towards the environment and the human person, in order to shape human coexistence. For him, the ecology of man comes before the ecology of nature.³⁰ We have been commanded to cultivate and protect the earth. We are to “cultivate creation”, “tilling it and keeping it” (Gen. 2:15). What we call “nature” in a cosmic sense has its origin in “a plan of love and truth.” God makes “his creatures share in his being, in his intelligence, and in his goodness.” This bodily existence has “a duty to exercise responsible stewardship over creation, to care for it and to cultivate it.”³¹ In order to save humankind from the danger of self-destruction or from earth predators – *anthropocene* – the care for creation must be one and the same with care for the “inviolability of human life in every one of its phases and every one of its conditions.”³² The degradation of human physical nature is closely linked to the constantly changing cultural models shaping human coexistence: consequently, “when ‘human ecology’ is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.”³³ We all have the duty to respect each physical ‘other’, considered both individually and in relation to others³⁴ and safeguard an authentic “human ecology” reaffirming the “inviolability of human life.”³⁵ We hold to the beauty and harmony of nature with a vision of the “dignity” of all living creatures, and with certain reciprocity between ourselves and

³⁰ Cf. Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, *If you want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*, 1 January 2010, n. 6. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html, 21.9.2020.

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 50.

³² Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, op.cit, n. 12; see also, *Caritas in Veritate*, 51, 28, 61.

³³ CV, 51.

³⁴ CV, 15, 51.

³⁵ CV, 28, 51.

the environment³⁶ without being influenced by ecocentrism and biocentrism which can lead to a neo-paganistic pantheism, thus falsely seeing the source of salvation in nature alone, understood in purely naturalistic terms.³⁷

Life as a gift from God, is filled with the deepest stirrings and desires of the human heart, seeking the ultimate purpose in life. This life as God's mystery is revealed through the body. The physical human body has a specific meaning. We need, therefore, an integrated vision of the human person—body, soul, and spirit. The feelings contained in the depths of body contribute to the development of certain bodily patterns. These are all learnt. We have received our body, as it is the form and pattern of the movements that reflect the pressure of external events. We express not only our response to the trauma of experience but also the system of self-reliance this has produced. Often for example, in this Covid-19 pandemic season, sicknesses and deaths are the product of the ferocity shown by our social system to our bodies. Today, we have to think for ourselves, look after our bodies, take precaution, improve the immunity and change our own lifestyle, so that the society will slowly begin to change.

Our bodies have terrible potentialities. We are starting this era with a new attitude to the human body in general, one of reconciliation, solidarity in facing the same fate, tenderness, and love. This will help us to care for and rescue those bodies wounded, abused by life. We are on the way to develop new culture of body, thus will give birth to a cosmic body. We can reach the meta-human body with a supreme-consciousness in life. It will be the pre-eminent body in the new situation, the rescued body of the new ethics, -ethics of happiness in corporeality. Justice for this happiness lies in developing structures that would guarantee that we all have the freedom to devise our own life-plan to obtain the means necessary to satisfy our need of every kind, from the most material to needs such as affection, dignity, pleasures etc. The ethics of happiness

³⁶ Message, 13.

³⁷ Ibid.

would be an ethics of bodies, because a happiness that does not take account of the actual, day-by-day bodies of men and women, young and children, is unthinkable. In such a setting the renewed cosmic body-consciousness can bring the dreams into its flesh.

The Poumai Naga Agricultural Festivals and Rituals vis-a-vis Folklores: Covid-19 Pandemic Application

Paul Punii & Dominic Meyieho

The traditional Poumai Naga People are basically agrarian and their lives revolve around it. Poumais are distributed into Paomata, Chilivai, Lepaona, and Razeba. As agrarian people they sow paddy; Daonü, Tainü, Marunü, Louka are festivals to usher the sowing of paddy. Duh is the ritual celebration for good seed. Paoki is the feast of plantation. Laonü is the post plantation festival. Nge is ritual celebration asking God to preserve the paddy from the attack of pestilence. Baoloutouyu is the prayer for abundance and eating of the first fruits. Thounü is the New Year thanksgiving celebration with abundance of food and wine. The festivals and rituals that preserve a community act as a deterrent to exceptional events like the Pandemic in the community history is a subterranean argument in the paper.

Keywords: Festivity, folklores, pandemic, Poumai rituals, agrarian practices.

Introduction

All over the world, the year 2020 has been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper will examine the 'Poumai Naga' Agricultural festivals and rituals in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The *Poumai* is a major Naga tribe with a population of 1,79,189 as per 2011 census.¹ The *Poumai* Nagas are basically an agrarian society, hence it closely observes the phases of the moon and the seasonal cycles. The rhythm of daily life throughout the year is affected and organised around the agrarian calendar. As a society where farming is hugely important for the subsistence of its members, it has developed a great variety of semi-religious events where prayers and rituals are offered for bountiful harvest, prayers

¹ The total area of the *Poumai* land covers 1,200 sq. km. There are 81 Poumai inhabited villages of which 68 are revenue recognized villages and 13 are unrecognized. The Poumai villages basically fall under three Sub-Divisions namely, Paomata SDO/BDO, Purul SDO/BDO, Phaibung SDO/BDO, some of the villages are under Kangpokpi Sub-Division and some in Phek District of Nagaland under Razeba circle. The Poumai Nagas are situated in the north district of Manipur and south of Nagaland.

for protection of crops from pestilence and stormy weather. These practices have gradually developed into community celebrations and festivals, and consequently they are the culture of the folks. Alan Dundes would call Folklore as a “mirror of culture,”² hence if anyone wants to know the culture of the Poumai Nagas, they will have to study the rituals and festivals which form the soul of Poumai folklore.

Agricultural Rituals and Festivals

The life of the Poumais basically moves along with the agricultural activities. Their live depends on the agricultural produce. And for good crop they depend on the timely arrival of the monsoon and good weather conditions. The different agricultural festivals celebrated by the Poumai Nagas indicate the ushering of different seasons of the lunar calendar. These festivals are replete with rituals, practices and celebrations. They are significant expressions of a group’s tradition, beliefs, values and identity.³ Let us make a quick run through into what a ritual and festival are.

Ritual

Ritual is ordinarily understood as a religious or solemn ceremony involving a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order. Writing on *Ritual* Roy A. Rappaport, gives three types of meaning to Ritual. First, ritual is understood to be a form or structure, that is, a number of features or characteristics in a more or less fixed relationship to one another.

A second feature noted in the definition is performance. If there is no performance, there is no ritual; performance itself is an aspect of that which is performed. The medium is part of the message; more precisely, it is a metamessage about whatever is encoded in the ritual.

² Simon J. Bronner, *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2007), 55.

³ Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: An Introduction to the Study of People and Their Traditions* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2005), 95.

The, third definition stipulates that the sequence of formal acts and utterances constituting ritual are not absolutely invariant but only more or less so. This stipulation not only allows for imperfection in performance but also recognizes that some variation will likely be present within any liturgical order (ritual) no matter how punctilious its performance must be.⁴

Messages Transmitted in Ritual

Ritualistic actions are performed in the belief that it will produce an effect; hence every action will have a meaning and a purpose. The very existence of variant and invariant aspects of ritual implies that two classes of messages are being transmitted. First, the apparently changeless messages signified by the invariant order of the ritual's canon. These are concerned with the enduring aspects of the social and cosmological order. Second, messages carried by whatever variation the ritual allows or requires.

The relationship of sign to signified in each of these two classes of messages may be different. That which is signified by the invariant canon is not confined to the here and now, may not be material, and, as in the case of transcendent deities, might not even be thought to exist in the space-time continuum. Since these significant are not present in their entirety, their signification requires the use of symbols.

In contrast, the state of the performers signalled by variations in performance exists in the here and now. As such, the relationship of the sign to the signified need not be symbolic, but may be indexical. A dark cloud for instance, is an index of rain.

Ritual, in sum, is not simply a collection of messages and metamessages but a complex form of communication in which the two sorts of messages are mutually dependent.⁵

⁴ Roy A. Rappaport, "Ritual," in *Folklore, Cultural Performance and Popular Entertainments* Richard Bauman(ed.), (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 249-250.

⁵ Rappaport, "Ritual," 251.

Festival

The common understanding of a festival is that, it is a day or a period of celebration typically for religious reasons. Festivals occur at calendrically regulated intervals and are public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure and multiple in voice, scene, and purpose. Festivals are collective phenomena and serve purposes rooted in group life. Systems of reciprocity and of shared responsibility ensure the continuity of and participation in the festival through the distribution of prestige and production. Stoeltje would say, "Most festivals provide the opportunity for individual religious devotion or individual performance, and this opportunity is a primary motive for the occasion." Furthermore Stoeltje states there are other unstated but important purposes of festivals, like the expression of group identity through ancestor worship or memorialisation, the performance of highly valued skills and talents, or the articulation of the group's heritage. Sometimes they may not even use the word festival but use a name that is related to the purpose or core symbols of the event.⁶

Ritual and Festival

From the definition given above we can understand that there is a relationship between ritual and festival. A ritual is often related to religion, though it can stand alone. Similarly, there are religious festivals but festivals need not have any connection to religion as well. However, in the Poumai Naga performance of rituals and celebrations of festivals, they form part of the cultural ethos of the people. The presentation and description of these rituals and festivals will bring forth the Poumai Naga corpus of historical-cultural heritage while trying to identify values, retrieve the lost, and create an identity.

The Poumai Nagas in general observe two ritual days and celebrate mostly agricultural festivals:

⁶ Beverly J. Stoeltje, "Festival," in *Folklore, Cultural Performance and Popular Entertainment*, Richard Bauman(ed.), (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 261.

1. *Duh*: Ritual observation for good plants
2. *Nge*: Ritual observation for good weather and protection from pestilence
3. *Daonü/Maruni/Tainü/Louka*: Seed Sowing Festival
4. *Paoki/Apao Soupya*: Feast and plantation Ritual
5. *Laonü*: Post-plantation festival
6. *Baolou touyu*: Feast of thanksgiving
7. *Thounü*: Feast of new crops

The Poumais in general observe these rituals and festivals, but not at the same time. Different villages observe and celebrate these festivals at different times, as the villages are spread over several mountain ranges with slight variations of climatic conditions. Besides, the same feast is celebrated with greater or lesser degree of gaiety depending on the village. The village Chief announces the beginning of these celebrations and the people readily participate in it. The festivals continue to be celebrated annually maintaining essentially the same form, while their original meaning has sometimes been forgotten. As Smith would say, "the enduring significance of the festival lies less in its avowed purpose or meaning than in the fact of celebration itself."⁷

The celebration of festivals according to Smith can be considered as "a major class of folklore, one that may include within itself almost all the others as subclasses."⁸ The celebration of festivals is preceded by ritualistic prayer and oblations to the deity. Every agricultural festival that is celebrated by the Poumai folks has a corresponding ritual and oblation that precedes the celebration. The festival brings people together to a common platform for singing and dancing, eating and drinking, recalling of momentous historical events, and narrating folktales etc. It is on these festivals that the

⁷ Robert J. Smith, "Festivals and Celebrations," in *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 160.

⁸ Smith, "Festivals and Celebrations," 168.

inhabitants of the region wear their traditional costumes and keep up their culture.

Thus, looking at the various activities of the festivals we concur with Smith who says that, “the prime function of the festival is to provide occasion and form for positive group interaction, which is a necessary condition for the continued existence of the group.”⁹ These events in the life of the people are fostered from generation to generation and they have become a folk-culture and folklore. We shall now present the various agricultural festivals and rituals. It may however be noted that due to the outbreak of COVID-19, there was no public gathering and celebration of any sort, though families had their celebrations.

Seed Sowing Festival

Rice is the staple food of the Poumai people and hence the sowing of paddy is done with great sacredness. The ritual for sowing of paddy seeds is observed with great care and sacredness in all villages but the pomp of the accompanying feast depends on the individual village. The Poumais are distributed into a large mountainous area and hence sowing and plantation of paddy occur at slightly different times.

***Daonii* /Seed Sowing**

Daonü is celebrated among Proumai villages (Phaibung subdivision) like Kodom, Lakhamai, Sirong and Shimai. The ritual begins on the 17th day of the lunar calendar of *Roupa* (March). This is the first day on which animals are killed in preparation for the celebration. On this day daughters who are married to men from other villages and relatives and guests arrive at the village for the celebration. These daughters are invited to all the houses of the uncles. And in the evening lots of meat (*souveh*) are packed for their journey back to their homes. On return they share this meat with all their in-laws, and also give a feast to the children.¹⁰

⁹ Smith, “Festivals and Celebrations,” 168.

¹⁰ Kuchaoru K. Jenny, “Daonii Festival in Zhamai, Lakhamai,” interview by Paul

On the second day, *Chidzü* (dedication of prayer to the home deity) ritual prayer and offering libation to the house deity is performed. It is a day of *genna* (day of ritual observation and refrain from work). The father of the family performs this ritual near the *rüphi* – the central pillar, which is also the altar of the house, fasts till noon. Two receptacles like cups are folded from a single plantain leaf, making sure that the two cups are taken from either side of the leaf – right side for grandpa and left side for grandma. Wine is poured into the plantain cup and offered to deity grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hralu*, saying “*Ra paipaoh, nehai zaoprai vei sohlou-o*. Come and be served your cup of wine grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hralu*.” The rest of the plantain leaf is left covering the cups.¹¹

In the evening when the household is about to sleep, the mother finally offers food to grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hralu*. The ritual is termed as *Hrailu thro thro*. Two leaves are torn from a single plantain leaf to serve as plate for grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hralu*. A little bit of meat is placed in the plantain leaf, and ginger is pinched and placed in the plate and offered to the house deities grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hralu* saying, “*Pai Tro eh Paoh Hralu, nehai tou eh zao vei tou-sou lou-o*. Grandma *Tro* and Grandpa *Hralu*, come and partake this food and wine to your heart’s content. Protect us from all evil.” The mother distributes the ginger or meat saying 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, (avoiding 7 in between). Grandma’s plate 20, grandpa’s plate 30, don’t know, you divide among yourselves (*tshü tsha lou ho, nai mai lya pi phyta tou lou - o*). Number 7 (seven) is believed to be a perfect number and hence the fear of unequal distribution makes the people to leave out the number seven. Then she keeps the plate at the *rüphi*, corner of the house and goes away. The ritual ends with this offering and appeasing of the house deity.

In the afternoon of this day young men gather to wrestle and prove their strength and masculinity. Men even from neighbouring villages come to compete in the wrestling. The third day is called

Punii, October 16, 2016.

¹¹ Loura Haba, “Laonii Festival in Zhaimai Village,” interview by Paul Punii, July 15, 2016.

Shepao where all guests and relatives were given a send-off with packs of food for their journey.

The fourth day is called *Nü ra nai* another day of observation of the feast. The village chief or the priest would get a blameless cock, split it from the mouth down to sight the omen. If lots of blood oozes from the chicken the monsoon is believed to be good and on time, if not there would be drought. Another omen or belief concerning the feast of *Daonü* is shower during this feast. Rain during this festival is a good omen for favourable monsoon and vice-versa.¹²

The priest or chief of the village who officiates the ritual collects two shoots of *Mousü* (rhus glabra plant) and a handful of *Laipa* (flower plant) and places them together in the field. The *Mousü* and *Laipa* are symbolically chosen for the abundant yield of their seeds. The village chief would then pray thus, "O God, may our rice grow like that of the seeds of *Mousü* and *Laipa* and may it yield a good harvest" (*Oh Ramai, e-rimai thou panou, moushi, eh laipapah kanou mache lou-o, eh panou cha veilou-o*). After the performance of this ritual, the people may start to plant various crops and sow paddy.¹³

Marunü/ Seed sowing

Marunü is observed by three Ngari villages. They occupy the north-eastern part of Poumai villages. This is the first day of the feast and they prepare for the feast by hunting and killing of animals on the 12th *Roupa* (March) of the Lunar calendar. The daughters married to men in other villages and guests arrive at the village on this day.

On the second day the ritual of *Chidzü* (prayer to the deity of the house) is performed. It is a day of *genna* where people refrain from work. The daughters are invited to the parent's house and are fed with good food and drinks. However the sisters do not sleep in

¹² Jenny, "Daonii Festival in Zhamai, Lakhamai," October 16, 2016.

¹³ David Ng. Sha, "The Poumai Naga Traditiona Rites and Rituals," in *Poumai Thounii Celebration: Our Culture is our Identity*, Paul Punii(ed.), (Senapati: Poumai Naga Union, 2016), January 4-6, 32-35.

their parent's house but at the house of their brothers or relatives, to show that they do not belong to the house any longer. In the evening young men compete in the wrestling as part of the festival.

On the third day *Shepao*, the daughters and relatives are given a send-off with food and meat packed for the journey and the relatives.

On the fourth day *Nü ra nai* the priest (or village chief in some cases) would pick a blameless cock, split it from the mouth down to see the omen. Then the blood is smeared with the paddy seed for the sowing, to signify life and fertility. The following day all the people go to sow paddy seeds in their own plots.¹⁴

Tainii/ Seed sowing

In Lepaona area (Purul sub-division) the sowing of seeds is called *Taimou thouyu*. The sowing of seeds begin during the last part of the month of *Süpa* (February) and early part of *Roupa* (March). On the appointed day, the village chief goes to the field and offers ginger and libation to the deity, and sows the seeds. Then he comes home and fasts and keeps the day sacred. The general public goes to sow seeds the following day.¹⁵

Pyä manai/ Louka/ Seed sowing genna

In Paomata area under Paomata sub-division there are two times when the seeds are sown; one for millet and the other for paddy. One day is set aside for observation of the ritual. It is a *genna* day. The people in the village are to abstain from work and activities such as; making baskets, weaving, and journey. They are not to hunt for bee hives, wasps and hornet combs. Even the married couples are to abstain from all conjugal signs of affection and relationships on those days of the ritual observation. The people have simple vegetarian meal with sesame seeds. The following day seeds can be

¹⁴ Jenny, "Daonii Festival in Zhamai, Lakhamai," October 16, 2016.

¹⁵ Souphio Samuel, "Taimou Thouyu," interviewed by Paul Punii, October 16, 2016.

sown. Millet is sown during the latter part of *Thounü khou* (January). The time is termed as *pya rai* first sowing.¹⁶

There is a feast to celebrate the beginning of the sowing of paddy seeds called *Louka*. On the first day after the new moon the young men of the village go to catch the bird *sei*, (thrush) catching with bare handed according to *khels* (clans). Once the bird is caught, they impale the bird on a long stick and march towards the *khel* gate and plant the head there as a trophy. In the evening all go home for celebration with best of food and drinks. On the following day, youngsters according to categories take part in wrestling. The strongest and the most skilful winner is honoured and respected in the village. The following day onwards the people can go for sowing paddy. Paddy seeds are sown after the new moon of *Roupya* (March).

Duh/Ritual for Timely Monsoon

The National lockdown due to COVID-19 had already been imposed long way by the time the ritual of *Duh* was to be observed. By this time the people were well aware that COVID-19, was a pandemic and people certainly were informed to seriously observe this *genna* day, to pray to god and to be freed from the attack of droughts, pandemic, and for favourable weather and monsoon. It was believed that the sincere and sacred observation of these days will ward off all droughts, epidemics.

It used to be an oft-repeated reminder by the elders to warn the youngsters not to violate the sanctity of the ritual days of *Duh* and *Nge*. The elders would reprimand the undisciplined people saying, *Taomai, nahmai, Duh eh Nge zhai sou-o. Rahri, rahtah, vei lou dzii matsi lai* – Grandchildren and Children, do not defy the ritual days of *Duh* and *Nge*. Else you will be punished when the epidemic or pandemic comes.¹⁷

¹⁶ Punii Michael, "Laonii Festival of the Poumai Nagas," interview by Paul Punii, July 13, 2016.

¹⁷ Hriinii T. Henry, "On Epidemic and Pandemic," interview by Paul Punii, October, 30, 2020.

This ritual is observed to invoke god's blessing for timely and sufficient rain water for the success of paddy seed transplantation. The people would worship the sky and the earth for a favourable time for transplantation of paddy seeds. It is two days observation of the ritual without work at the beginning of May before the plantation begins. The ritual *Chidzū* and *Hrailu thro thro* – prayers, food and libation to the home deity are offered.

The previous night water is fetched from the ritual pond for the next day's ritual. In the morning yeast is powdered and put in the gourd and poured into the two cups made from plantain leaf. Mixture from the gourd is poured into the plantain cup and offered to deity grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hrailu*, saying "come and be served your cup of wine grandma *Tro* and grandpa *Hralu*" (*Pai tro eh pao Hrailu, nehai prai vei solou-o*). The rest of the plantain leaf is left covering the cups.

In the evening when all activity of the day is over the mother prepares two plantain leaves like plate and places few pieces of uncooked rice and pieces of ginger into the plates of the deities grandma *tro* and grandpa *hralu*. When food is distributed the mother counts till 10 taking care to avoid the number 7. "You may share and divide equally yourself." (*li, hai, sü, dai, ngao, zi, cha, ke, kiru. Pai zha make, pou zha shirou, madeimo bu-a, nehai lya phiphyu lou.*) Then the family goes to rest.¹⁸

These two days are days of religious observance. It is a *genna* to go to the field. The people in the village are to abstain from games, work and activities such as; making baskets, weaving, and journey. Even the married couples are to abstain from all conjugal signs of affection and relationships. The faithful observance of these days is believed to appease God and give sufficient rain for the transplantation.¹⁹

¹⁸ Michael, "Laonii Festival of the Poumai Nagas," July 13, 2016.

¹⁹ Michael, "Laonii Festival of the Poumai Nagas," July 13, 2016.

Paddy Plantation/ *Thao Shodi*

The plantation of paddy is another great event in the life of the Poumai people. The beginning of the paddy plantation is done with religious sacredness. The Leopaona area (Purul Sub-division) calls it *Paoki* while the other Poumai areas content with the ritual of *Apao soupya* – cutting of meat for offering to the deity and family consumption.

***Paoki*/ Paddy plantation season**

Paoki means paddy plantation season. It is a celebration to usher in plantation of paddy – rice that is eaten throughout the year. *Paoki* is celebrated with great pomp and enjoyment in Leopaona area particularly in Purul by both the rich and poor people alike. In this feast good wine is prepared and lots of meat and fish too. At this time the daughters who are married off to other villages and family guests and friends from other villages are also invited. All those who arrive for this feast are accorded great hospitality.

Paoki is celebrated for three days, *ranai*, *thaopai*, *lu shoyu theithe*. On *ranai* animals like dogs, pigs, cows and buffaloes and chickens are killed for celebration. The following day called *Thaopaiyu* the paddy seedlings are plucked and gathered. On this day the relatives and friends and guests arrive at the village. In the evening there is wrestling competition among the village youth and against young men from other villages. Once wrestling is over, in the evening the young boys and girls gather for singing competition. It is a time when young boys and girls come to know their special qualities and court each other.²⁰

Early the next day at dawn the mother first goes to the field and offers small meat pieces in the corner of the field, pinches ginger and throws into the field and also offers libation to the deity (tips a little wine in the field) saying the following prayers:

Deiro thou paou, ngaopathou lelou tesou, aliro khai poteivei lurouthou shothou khaitiyu taimohihai khao raohou aliro tekhai raroshi peima vedaimore

²⁰ Heshoru Dio, *Paih-Pao Maivei Zhaidou* (Purul Atongba: Heshoru Dio, 2009), 19. *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, XI(2020) 2: 75-102

*donou...*²¹ (Let the earth bring forth abundantly... and let the paddy that has been planted for this year, be not destroyed by animals or birds, and let it not be destroyed by wind and storm).

***Apao Soupya* / Meat for the plantation season**

In Paomata, Razeba and Chilivai areas (north and north-east Poumai) there is the cutting of animals on the first day. Early the next morning the mother first goes to the field, tears pieces of meat, ginger and keeps in the corner of the field and also offers libation to the deity (tips a little wine in the field) saying the prayers:

- *Pa teithi avei zou pa sho dao lou-a* (Let the seedlings be planted on a good day)
- *Pa teithrai teirü ashi sou mashi mo-a* (Let it not be spoiled by the wind and rain)
- *Pa mara mari panou trou dei sou-ah* (Let it not be hit by hailstones)
- *Pa beidu, trodu-a* (Let it have big stalks, heavy with grains)
- *Pa ratsi thou avei matsi lou-o.* (Be blessed with abundant fruits).
- *Pa chavei sou-ah pa vah lou-o* (Give us a bountiful harvest).²²

***Laonü* / Post-Plantation Festival**

Laonü is a post-plantation festival of the Poumai Nagas. The people celebrated the feast in a very sober manner due to COVID-19, without much fanfare and gathering. This festival is celebrated in the month of *Lao* (July) after all the people in the village have completed paddy transplantation. All farmers are supposed to complete paddy transplantation before the festival. If paddy transplantation could not be completed in any part of the field, it is left fallow for that year. In cases of the late arrival of the monsoon, the month is extended as *Lao hai* (July II). In this case the month

²¹ Dio, *Paih-Pao Maivei Zhaidou*, 19.

²² Michael, "Laonii Festival of the Poumai Nagas," July 13, 2016.

of *Lai* (August) is omitted to proceed with *Nge* (September).²³ The Poumai villages celebrate *Laonii* at different times depending on the climatic condition, and completion of paddy transplantation.

The *Laonii* festival is celebrated for five days. The *Laonii* festival incorporates many other important motifs of celebrations like ritual for house warming, prayer and performing of the ritual for good crop, ceremony of the purification for male children, offering prayers and food to the house deity, social festival (*Morung* fest), wrestling, prayer for protection etc. Each of these motifs is celebrated on different days of the *Laonii* festival. The motifs will be explained on the different days.

Paonii chüche/ Gathering Firewood

This is the first day of the festival. There are two motifs celebrated on this day. Firstly this is the beginning day of the feast. Early in the morning boys in the *morung* perform the *Mou kho di* (praying for abundance and good fruit) ceremony. The prayer should be pronounced only in the morning when all the members are ready. The host of the *morung* begins the ceremony crying aloud:

Elder: *Painao dzüthou dei kou de she* (The egg / seed of the deity *Painao* has been given)

Boys: *tre, tre, tre, tre* (makes the sound *tre*)

Elder: *Oh, tshi ludu, lu ludu, tsa-mou che-a, pei pai-a laide she*

(Oh, through south and *Lu* road, they are coming laden with fruits, and hairs falling due to heavy burden).

Boys: *tre, tre, tre, tre* (makes the sound *tre*)

Elder: *Oh, Chea ludu, Ri ludu, tsa-mou che-a, pei pai-a laide she*

(Oh, through *Chea* and forest road, they are coming laden with fruits, and hairs falling due to heavy burden).

Boys: *tre, tre, tre, tre* (makes the sound *tre*)

Elder: Then he pronounces the final blessing thus,

²³ Saloni Pao, "The Laonii Festival," *The Morung Express*, July 15, 2007.

Tshrai, tshrai pya heu tshrai dei kuo (let it be as tasty as the sharpened spear would bring).

Thrai, thrai pya amou kai kuo (let it be as sour as the *amou tchü* fruit)

Haihinou vei tsulai dei (we shall begin afresh from here).²⁴

The refrain *tre, tre, tre*, should have a rhythm and it should not be broken till the final blessing. If the rhythm is broken or stopped it is feared that the whole clan of the boys at the *morung* will be wiped out. After the blessing they move to the courtyard and perform the whoop (*Mavo sou di*). Meanwhile two young boys go to the *ritual* pond to fetch water. When the water is brought the eldest makes a cup out of plantain leave. He then fills the plantain cup with the water from *ritual* pond and pours the water over the head of the two small boys at the entrance of the house called *paphi* (place for milling paddy). The boys should not be shocked as the cold water is poured over their head. This is a sign of good omen.

These same boys go to the jungle to bring a shrub called *amousü* (scientific name *Rhus glabra*) and places it at three corners of the house; this is called *Shu pokhai di* (keeping the *shu*). These pieces of wood will be used for the starting of new fire (*mei la di*) the following year during the day of male purification ceremony – *Chazü*.

Secondly, on this day house warming ceremony is conducted for those who had built new houses between the months of *Donü* (December) and *Süpa* (February). Two young boys accompany the host for the house warming ceremony where they perform *Chidzü*. It is a day of *genna*. The two boys fetch water from the *ritual* pond and fetch water for the ritual. They then go to the forest and bring branches of *Amousü* and pierce it to the three corners of the house. The host first offers libation to the house deity, (tipping some wine in the inner side of his self) then offers wine in the plantain leave to the two boys assisting him in the ritual. They observe this ritual till noon when they are allowed to have their food. It is called *Lee di* (it is period of fasting and observance). After food they are allowed to go home. In the evening the mother performs the *Hrailu thro thro*.

²⁴ Haba, "Laonii Festival in Zhaimai Village," July 15, 2016.

Paonii ho nuh/ Ritual work day

On this day people go to the field for work but come back early. It is a time for cleaning the surroundings of the field. They weed out the long grass and plants on the side of the field and clear the path. This activity is done as part of the ritual during the feast.

Mou ra sou/ Prayer for good seeds

On this day the people do not go to the field but stay home and pray for good fruit and crops. They pray that the paddy be protected against hailstorms and pestilence. The people observe the day as holy without doing the ordinary works of weeding, working etc...

Chazü/ Male purification ceremony

Chazü is the purification ceremony for the male child. This purification ritual is done after a child completes one year or more. This ritual can be done any time after one year to five years of age, when the child has become sturdy. The ritual is performed with the belief that he is strong enough to mature into a fully human being. The parents can now claim the child physically and spiritually.

A young boy assists and performs the rites for the child. In the morning the first duty of the assistant is to churn out new fire from the *Amousü* which was kept the previous year during *Chidzü* ceremony. The process is called *mei la di* - making of new fire. Once the fire is ignited the assistant plants three stones in a tripod shape, plus the fourth small one behind another big stone called *thaopa*. The *thaopa* signifies prayer for unity and fellowship among brothers.

The young boy then goes to the *ritual* pond to fetch water. He carries the pitcher *Pouli* in the basket *shoro*. He holds the spear on the right hand and in the left hand he holds a gourd mug, a sickle and rumex leave *malou*. The *spear* is a symbol of the male warrior, and *malou* a medicine to ward off evil spirits. The sickle and the gourd is a symbol of domestic work. This water brought is used for all ritualistic and cooking purposes of the *Chazü* ceremony.

Once the young boy gets home he takes the dried *Mahurai* (a creeper) and prepares a necklace-like cord with the *malou* stem. The child is then made to sit on the small seat called *shobuh*. The three cords are then tied, one on the left leg, one on the right hand and one around the neck. This symbol is a prefiguration of the child, when as a man he would go out for war and challenge his enemies and shout *hi oh* (a cry of challenge). When he shouts *hi oh* his left leg steps forward holding a knife or spear in the right hand. And in the fight whoever wins beheads the other as a war trophy. And so *Chazü* is a symbolic ritual of purification and victory of the child.

With the water brought earlier from the *ritual pond* the young man dabs it to different joints of the body. He first dabs the water on the crown of the head, then ears, shoulders, elbow, wrists, heart, hip joints, knees, and ankles. This is a blessing for the strength and good health of the child. All these rituals are performed at the *paphi* (place where rice is milled).

The young man then holds the hand of the child and kills a cock in his name by piercing it with a sharp bamboo at the side. After the cock is killed he plucks out the heart which will be cooked and offered to the deity of the house during *hrailu thro thro* which will be performed in the evening. The young man then ceremoniously prepares rice (*kay thou*) and chicken to feed the child. The rice and curry are cooked in *pouli*, specially reserved only for this ritual. The spoons and ladles used for this ritual are kept separately. The leftover of the rice that is cooked for the ritual to feed the boy is then rolled tight in the plantain leaf and kept in one corner of the roof. It is believed that the tightly rolled rice will bring good health to the child. The *Chazü* ritual for the boy will officially be over after performing *chidzü* and *hrailu thro thro*. At the time of *hrailu thro thro* the mother cuts a piece of ginger and slowly throws it to the ground. Both the pieces should land flat with the plan side on the floor. This is good omen.

The young man than continues to cook food for himself and other male members of the family. All these rituals are performed at the guidance and instruction of the father. The father performs

the *Chidzū* ritual and continues to fast till noon. The mother and the girls of the family kill a young hen for themselves in the inner chamber of the house. They do not share in the rituals and food of the father and male members.

On this day another ritual called *Leutoudi* is performed by a *Meshemai*. *Meshemais* are those people who have performed the feast of Merit (offered wine and meat to the whole village). They observe the ritual of prayer and fasting near *paphi* where the altar of buffalo head has been hung. They have a little food in the afternoon. Sometimes this ritual of prayer and fast goes even up to five days. He observes these days as sacred to thank god for the wealth and prosperity given to him. He also pray to god to bless the *Laonü* festival.

On this day the animals are killed for the celebration of the *Laonü* festival. The rich and poor alike kill lots of chicken, pigs, dogs, cows and buffaloes reared for this occasion. Every family in the village prepare lots of rice beer *zou* for the feast. The *Laonü* festival is celebrated with great pomp and enjoyment. Lots of meat is bought by the families also to give as *sou majhü* (a portion of meat) to daughters and sisters who are married. It is also on this day that sisters and guests from other villages come to the village to celebrate the festival.

Chidzū/ Prayer to the home deity

The ritual of *chidzū* is performed on this day. It is a day of *genna*. In this ritual *chidzū* is the source and origin of all other *chidzū*. And in the evening *hralu thro thro* is performed. The daughters or sisters who are married and who come from other villages and guests are invited to their father's / brother's home and fed with good food and drinks. This day is also called *nüdu* (big feast) the most important day in the *Laonü* festival. Everyone in the village enjoys with good food and drinks. On this day young boys gather in their peers to spend time together exchanging food and drinks. So also girls in their groups enjoy and share food and drinks according to their morung. It is a *genna* to go to the field.

Shepao/ Bidding farewell to the guest

On this day the daughters, sisters and guests who came from other villages return to their home. They are sent off with lots of meat, local bread, food, drinks and vegetables.

In Zhaimai village, in the evening of these three important days of *Chazü*, *Chidzü*, and *Shepao* the young men and children of the village play *Vai-o*. This dance is known and performed only in Zhaimai village. It begins with *Mavo* whoopi done khel wise, then the young men gather together to perform the *Vai-o*. It's a dance exhibiting joy, celebration, khel unity and village unity.

Khaphya/ Fishing day

The word *Khaphya* literally means fishes are let out. It is a day when the womenfolk go to the field and river to fish. They would try to catch as much fish as possible because on the way young boys would wait to see who caught more, and ask for contribution. The boys in their turn would cook good meat and bring to have party with them in their morung.

Putou Chupo/ Wrestling day

On this day young boys would gather in a large village courtyard to have wrestling. The winner would be proclaimed as the strongest man in the village. To be acclaimed such was a pride and honour for him and the family. Wrestling is a very ancient game of the Nagas where courage and manliness is shone. Sometimes fights and quarrels in the villages were settled through wrestling. Those who were strong and knew how to wrestle were considered heroes in the village.

Sou ba nai/ Last feast

The feast slowly comes to an end in the village. Those who killed animals in the village for the feast will conclude the feast with the limbs of the animals. *Sou ba nai* would mean feasting on the left overs / limbs of the meat.

Nü teu/ End of the feast

Nü teu means end of the feast. This day officially ends the feast of *Laonü*. After this day the chief of the village will officially declare open the collection of *Lou*. *Lou* is a nettle plant whose crust is peeled and processed to make clothes. After this day people begin to assume their normal work and activity.

Nge/ Prayer for Preservation from Pestilence

Nge is the name of the month of September in *Poula*. However it also refers to the ritual that is observed for three days. People pray and worship the sky and earth so that the fruits of their fields may be protected from thunder-storm and bad weather. All members of the village observe these days with great sacredness. It is a day of *genna*. No one should go to the field or forest – no one should even dry their clothes in sun. Even children and youth are not allowed to play any type of games. There should not be any form of fun fare and revelry even prohibiting marital and conjugal relationships. This year due to the pandemic COVID-19, the ritual was observed with even greater sacredness.

Nge dzü/ Ritual day of prayer to deity

This is the first day of *Nge* observation where *Chidzü* ritual is performed. In the afternoon an unblemished heifer is drawn into the village Chief's courtyard for a symbolic ritual. The heifer is tied to a post in the Chief's courtyard for a day and released in the evening. This process is carried out for three consecutive days to be a forecast for the climatic conditions of the year.

Nge pa/ Second day of Nge

This is the second day when the Chief ties the heifer in the courtyard and he observes the direction of the mooing of the heifer. It is believed that if the heifer moos facing the east, then hailstorms are expected in the east, and if it moos facing the west, hailstorms are expected in the west. According to *Saranamai* tradition, on this day a

dog (called *Thepao*) is sacrificed by the Chief. Pieces of this meat are distributed to every household to perform the sin offering oblation. All meat pieces should be consumed on the same day.

***Nge veih hro*/Release of the heifer**

This is the day when the heifer is released from being tied in the courtyard of the king and so the name *veih hro* (heifer released from being tied). The leaf of the ficus tree *bousü* is placed in front of the house as a symbolic ritual of cleansing and protection for the house. Members of the family are forbidden to consume meat on this day.²⁵

***Saka*/Ritual cursing of the Cat**

Every year in the month of *Yupfo khou* October, a day is set aside to perform *saka*. *Saka* literally means *sa* cat, *ka* curse. This curse is performed against those who might not have observed properly the *Duh* and *Nge* ritual thus leading to drought, bad weather, thunderstorm and poor harvest. A cat is ensnared in a small bamboo basket and smashed to death with a stone, leading to loud cry and struggle. All the people gather and curse saying *oh thuih* (throwing out spittle as a sign of repugnance), when the leader shouts and puts forward the intention like those who refused to perform the rituals, those who steal others things, who possess evil spirits, and who tend to claim others property. In the mean while an old man kills the cat, symbolising the struggle these people should have at their death.

***Thotho*/Thanksgiving for the New Harvest**

This is a ritual of offering the first fruits to God. There are two times this ritual is performed. The first ritual is done at the time of *Khana khou* (May) when millet, cucumber and other fruits are harvested. And the second ritual is performed before *Nge* (September). At the time of plantation some paddy plants are planted near the house. This is used for the first offering to the deity. The village chief

²⁵ Materou Dorothy, *The Siimai Tyahrii Nii: Kindred Fest 2010* (Senapati: Siimai Tyahrii Nii Committee, 2010), 47.

announces and performs the ritual on the first day and the villages follow suit the next day. In the present times the offering is symbolic and can be done in the morning or evening. The new fruit grains, rice is placed into the pot and cooked. When it is cooked, two tiny plantain leaves are placed on the right and left of the plate, a little rice is placed on the leaves for grandma *tro* and grandpa *hralu*. Then the children are fed saying, “*Thothou hai toulou-a, ramaha buh-o,*” (We are eating first fruits, eat and be blessed). Before this offering is done it is a forbidden *nyu* to eat any new produce of the field.²⁶

Baoloutouyu/Inauguration of the New Rice Barn

This is a very sacred ritual which is performed in the family before using any grains from the barn. The word *baoloutou* is made up of three words, *bao* means rice barn, *lou* means to take from and *tou* means eat. So *baoloutou* would mean to take from the barn and eat. This ritual begins on the fifth day of the new month of *Donü* (December). There are six ceremonious days: *Bao khai sou*, *Bao troo lou*, *Baodu hradi*, *Lu daodi*, *Loudi*, *Baolou Veinai*.²⁷

Bao khai sou/Inauguration of the barn

In the morning the mother goes in search of the mud silt made by the earth worm, brings home, opens the barn and spreads over the paddy, praying that the paddy must increase and multiply like the silt mud made by earthworms. She then fetches the *thrübüi*/shrub with strong roots and places two plants under the barn wishing for good paddy and strong roots like the plant.

Bao tro lou/Refilling the barn

This is the second day, observed especially by those who had performed the feast of Merits known as the *Meshimai*. *Bao tro lou*

²⁶ Hriinii T. Henry, Khochi Paotsi and Weikho P. Sebastian, “Thounii Festival of the Poumai Nagas,” interview by Paul Punii, October 16, 2016.

²⁷ Punii Michael, “Poumai Baolutoudi,” interviewed by Paul Punii, October 22, 2016.

di literally means to fill again. The man go to their field where they had left few stalks uncut during the harvest. They bring the paddy home and spread over the other paddy. It is a prayer and a sign for abundance.

Baodu hra/ Opening of the big barn

The word *baodu hra* literally means to open the big barn. On this third day a young innocent girl is chosen from the family or the neighbourhood to bless the barn. She should cover her head with a veil. She should not have eaten any jungle meat, meat offered to idols and *Pyasou* – meat served in honour of the dead. The mother or father fetches water from the ritual pond and soaks millet grains in it. The young girl then picks a few millet grains and throws into the rice barn. This same young girl can perform the ritual for other families too. They all feed her after the ceremony. The part of this girl can also be performed by a *Meshimai* woman. After meal men go to the river and fields to catch *crabs* and *khanü* (tiny freshwater fish). Crabs are brought home and given to the girl who performs the blessing of the barn and for their own consumption. The fish *khanü* is brought home and in the evening the mother rubs the four corners of the barn, and also uses for consumption. After performing this ritual she eats her food and goes to rest. This should be the last activity of the day.

According to Heshoru Dio, in the Lepaona tradition, the young girl is called the *Lüpüti* fairy. Two *lüpüti* fairies are chosen by the elders from the village who will stay in the village Chief's house till the *Baoloutouyu* ceremony is over. When the womenfolk brings *khanü* small fish from the field, these two little fairies will be carried around and go to every house to smear *khanü* at the corner of the rice barn. This ritual is done to seek the blessings of the fairies so that food grains may last till the end of the year.²⁸

²⁸ Dio, *Paih-Pao Maivei Zhaidou*, 27.

***Lu dao di*/Ritual digging of the field**

On the fourth day the man offers libation to the home deity and goes to dig the field as part of a ritual. The woman cooks food and gives a feast to the grandchildren. All the grandchildren are fed as a sign of abundance. With this the *baoloutouyu* ceremony comes to an end.

***Lou di*/Collecting thatch**

On this day the man who would like to make new houses get up early (for fear others will collect before him), kills a chicken and go to collect thatch grass for making houses. However he brings thatch grass and keeps the bundle outside the village gate. He comes the next day to carry home the bundle of thatch grass. Young boys and girls go to the forest to collect *bü* (a long stalky plant called himalayan lily) and *zaolu* (a tree that produces large bean sized seeds) for children to play. The season is thus open for the children and young people to play and have fun with these instruments.²⁹

***Thonü* / New Year Festival**

Thonü is one most popular agricultural and customary festival of the Poumai Nagas celebrated every year after the harvest. According to the Poumai Naga Lunar calendar it falls at the new moon after the winter solstice somewhere between the months of December and January. The word *Thounü* literally means feast of new paddy. The month when this feast is celebrated is called *Thounü khou*. Presently people celebrate it as Poumai New year. It was decided in the year 2012 by the Poumai Naga Union (PNU), that Poumai Thounü will be celebrated and commemorated on 5th of January every year. It is a month where people give thanks to God for *tho thou* (fresh paddy). The *Thounü* festival is an occasion to thank God for the good harvest. It is considered as one of the biggest and grandest festival because of the attribution of pleasant climate, abundance of food grains, drinks and the festive mood of the people. Even as the

²⁹ Michael, "Poumai Baoloutoudi," October 22, 2016.

feast is approaching, hopefully the people will refrain from large public gatherings due to COVID-19.

The celebration of the *Thounü* is announced by the village chief seven days ahead before the actual feast day. The people then begin to prepare for the celebration especially drying and milling the paddy for brewing rice beer. The *Thounü* is celebrated for five days *Thounü sha, Thounü nüdu, Shepao, Thounü dai, Thounü ngou*.³⁰

Thounü Sha/ First day of Celebration

The first day of the festival is known as *Shaa/Saa*. This day is marked as the day of rejoicing and happiness. It's a preparation day for the festival. Animals like dog, pig, cow and buffaloes for the feast are killed. The rice beer prepared for the feast is blessed and tasted on this day. In the evening the family members sit together and bake bread on a hot flat stone. The bread is made of powdered rice, and sesame paste is applied on the bread for better taste. Daughters and guest from other villages arrive on this day.

People clean the surroundings of their house and the streets, roads and stone courtyards. Young people go in groups to clean the village approach roads. These youngsters collect wine from the villagers as price for cleaning the approach roads and gather in the evening to celebrate at the morung.

Thounü Chidzü/ Second day

The second day of the festival is the main day of the feast spent in eating and drinking and merry making. The father of the family performs the *chidzü* says a prayer and offers meat and ginger and libation of wine to the house deity at the *rüphi*. Friends and families gather in groups sharing food, drinks, singing folks songs and telling stories. Young boys and girls, even children gather in groups to celebrate the feast. In the evening, when all have eaten and before

³⁰ Silas H. Zho, "The Poumai Naga Thounii: The Most Popular Coustomary Festival," in *Poumai Thounii Celebration: Our Culture is our Identity* Paul Punii(ed.), (Senapati: Poumai Thounii Committee, 2016), 4-6;41-42.

going to sleep the mother performs the final ritual of *hrailu thro thro*, offering of food to the home deity.

***Thounü shepao*/ Bidding farewell**

Thounü shepao is the day when the relatives and guests are escorted back after the festival. They are sent back with lots of food pack, raw meat and drinks for themselves and for their relatives. The more the gifts carried, the wealthier they are thought to be by the relatives.

***Thounü dai*/ Fourth day**

The fourth day of *Thounü* is celebrated with dance and sporting activities among the people. Indigenous sports like shot-put with stones of various sizes, weight lifting, and javelin throw with long wooden pestle; long jump and high jump are played on this day. The traditional war dance is an essential part of the festival and is performed in groups especially by the youngsters. They are performed by players clad in full traditional attires.

***Thounü ngou*/ Fifth day**

It is the fifth day of the feast day. The celebration with food, drinks and traditional games and dances continue even to this day. It is an extension of the previous day's celebration.

Other Significance

The *Thounü* season also marks the initiation of new village settlements after considering the various aspects and observation of omens, dreams, signs and divination etc...*Thounü* is also the time when *joh shudi* takes place. *Joh shudi* literally means sharing food pack which she brought from her parent's home. It is a feast where the newly married bride prepares good rice beer with paddy brought from her parents and offers to the grooms parents, uncles, brothers and cousins. This officially makes the bride welcomed into the family and the clan. Henceforth she becomes their daughter and

their sister. Later these uncles and brothers will invite the couple for a meal.

Response to Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and the extent of its worldwide fatal experience is first of its kind that most people around the world are experiencing in their life time. The pandemic is portrayed as such a fearful thing also because of the round the clock bombardment of Covid-19 news by media. A similar sickness of this nature, but of lesser degree is the small pox of 1974, of which many elders in the villages have some memory. There are other natural disasters like, droughts, landslides and hailstorms that destroy paddy and rice grains. It is in these situations that the people were religiously reminded to observe the rituals of *Duh* and *Nge* devoutly.

The ritual days of *Duh* in the month of May, just before the plantation and the ritual days of *Nge* in the month of September before the harvest begins are very sacred days and calls for the sanctimonious observance of these days. As narrated above, on these days all the members of the village participate in offering prayer and wine libation to the deity, observe fast, and refrain from revelry. The strict and sanctimonious observance of these days is very important and it is believed that indiscipline and defying of the sanctimony of these days will bring ill fate to them. The law breakers especially will be affected by diseases, epidemic and pandemics.

As for the Poumai people and its villages, since the people are basically agrarian even when the lockdown was imposed by the Government of India on 25th March 2020, they continued their normal agricultural activity of plantation, weeding and harvest. The schooling of children, travel outside the village to cities, and business communities were affected but agricultural lives of the people in general were unaffected by the Covid-19.

Conclusion

In the description of the above Poumai Naga festivals and their concurrent rituals we see a strong underlying socio-religious structure that stands out to form an identity and a tradition. These socio-religious practice of the folks etches the historico-cultural heritage on the fabric of the Poumai identity. In all festivals three days clearly stand out—*Sha* the preparation day, *chidzui*; worship and celebration and *shepao*; celebration and farewell for the relatives. The festivals are held after the new moon of every month. Sacrificing of birds and animals and other activities are part of these celebrations. The observance and celebration of these agricultural festivals performs certain functions in the society. In many cases rituals teach us the rules, beliefs and attitudes necessary for our functioning in the society in which we live.

These agricultural festivals, rituals and practices were considered sacred and are practiced across the villages where the people are commonly bound by *Poula* language. These conceptual linguistic frameworks of festivals, rituals and practices can be called what leads to the establishment of the Poumai Naga identity and tradition. The annual celebration and performance of these feasts and rituals persuades the people to believe that the values portrayed or referred to during the rituals are true values. In the words of Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens, the community is built, “by enacting rituals that expresses their beliefs and values, [and] they hope to influence group members to live according to the principles that rituals embody, thereby creating a ...community that possess and promotes those values.”³¹ In the presentation and analyses of these Poumai Naga Agricultural festivals one can find that the people are religious with lots of rituals to be performed, socially oriented with many community celebrations and sibling bonding, culturally beautiful with variety of costumes, artefacts, signs and symbols to give meaning to the folkloric tradition.

³¹ Sims and Stephens, *Living Folklore*, 101.

A Longitudinal Study on the Psycho-Sociological Impact of COVID -19 Lockdown on College Students & Faculty

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As we are travelling through the ambiguous viral times, the papers attempts for a preliminary assessment of the fear and anxiety among the faculty and students of Salesian College. From the data accumulated through a series of online questionnaires, the paper analyses the impact of the lockdown on a diverse range of indicators – that includes boredom, aspects of the future, sociality – conducted with a group of faculty and students of the college.

Keywords: Pandemic, Salesian College, psycho-social impact, boredom, anxiety.

An Intervention

Traditionally though being healthy was associated with the ability to perform the tasks assigned to oneself in the family or work environment, a shift has occurred in health coming to beconsidered the balance betweenphysical, mental and social well-being. Probably it goes to the now classical definition by WHO (World Health Organization), “health is a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”¹The past few months have added to the familiar world of words new terms that evoke feelings like the pandemic, quarantine, lockdown and social distance. The COVID-19 pandemic is by now rated as one of greatesthealth challenges thehistory of humankind has evercome to face. The pandemic has ravaged the world in more ways than one andchanged lives of individuals and communities in ways that are in some sense irreversible. COVID-19 believed to have started off on

¹ WHO,

<https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution#:~:text=Health%20is%20a%20state%20of,belief%2C%20economic%20or%20social%20condition.>

December 2019 at Wuhan city of central Hubei province of China,² is by now a global phenomenon that defies the logic of time and space.

It was on 11th January 2020 that China announced its first Covid-19 related death.³ Within a couple of weeks the infection had recorded a spread across the globe at an alarming pace.⁴ By the time on 11th March 2020 when WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic it was recorded to have reached about 114 countries.⁵ The arrival of the virus marked the spread of fear and near trauma associated with the large number of deaths it was leaving behind, in more than one country and especially among the elderly. On 23rd March 2020 the tally of people who died from COVID-19 stood at 14,509 and rising.⁶

COVID-19 is found to be highly contagious and spreads at a very rapid pace with the longevity of the virus deposited on surfaces contaminated for nearly a week. This omnivorous coronavirus hit India in March 2020. The dreadful nature of this pandemic made one numb and its high fatality rate created universal psychosocial impact in the form of mass hysteria, and it had direct and indirect impact on the economic uncertainty that loomed large for a vast majority of the population. People panicked and started behaving strangely as 'coronaphobia' generated a plethora of psychosocial manifestations across every corner of society. The rapid mode in which hysteria and panic spread regarding COVID-19 could beget enduring psychological impact on the public - even more than the socio-economic domains - which could potentially be more

² M.L. Holshue *et al.*, "First case of Novel Corona virus in the United States" *New England Journal of Medicine* 382, 10(2020): 929-936. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa2001191>.

³ WHO, "Pneumonia of Unknown Cause- China," 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/csr/>

⁴ WHO, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)", Situation Report- 46, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200306->

⁵ WHO, "Rolling Updates on Corona virus Disease (COVID-19)," 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>.

⁶ WHO, "Corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19)", Situation Report - 63, 2020. *Salesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, XI(2020) 2: 103-118

detrimental in the long run.⁷ In order to, supposedly, combat the disease and to prevent the spread of infection Government of India imposed a lockdown on 24th March 2020. People were forced to stay at home. The social fabric of India thrives on interdependence – both emotional and economic – within the families, relatives and friends.⁸ Close physical interactions like living in crowded housing and other places necessitates pushing and jostling which are extremely common and are a deterrent to ‘social-distancing’ as mandated during the pandemic.⁹ The economic impact of this pandemic on India includes increase in poverty – pushing more people below poverty line¹⁰ resulting in the worsening of socio-economic inequalities.¹¹ It becomes a truism that as a consequence the people have become more prone to psychological distress during the pandemic.¹²

It has affected almost all the individuals in the society. It is also evinced that students, teachers, and researchers have not been excluded from registering some levels of stress and anxiety. One set of existing literature focussing on these groups within society argues that special attention should be diverted to them on account of the potentially higher psychological distress related impact

⁷ A. Depoux *et al.*, “The pandemic of social media panic travels faster than the COVID-19 outbreak,” *Journal of Travel Medicine* 27, 3(2020).

⁸ D. Jacobson, “Indian Society and ways of living,” *Asia Society*, 2020. Retrieved from <https://asiasociety.org/education/indian-society-and-ways-living>.

⁹ H.S. Gopalan and A. Misra, “COVID-19 pandemic and challenges for socio-economic issues, healthcare and National Health Programs in India,” *Diabetes Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research and Reviews* 14, 5(2020): 757-59. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dsx.2020.05.041>

¹⁰ M.K. Anser *et al.*, “Does Communicable Diseases (including COVID-19) may increase global poverty risk? A cloud on the Horizon,” *Journal of Environmental Research* 187, 2020. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2020.109668>.

¹¹ S. Mahendra Dev, “Addressing COVID-19 Impacts on Agriculture, Food Security and Livelihoods in India,” IFRI: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2020 Retrieved from <https://www.ifri.org/blog/addressing-COVID-19-impacts-agriculture-food-security-and-livelihoods-india>.

¹² U. Rehman *et al.*, “Depression, Anxiety and Stress Among Indians in Times of Covid-19 Lockdown,” *Community mental health journal*, 2020:1-7. Advanced online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597020-00664-x>

experienced by them.¹³The longitudinal study presented here is an attempt by Salesian College to uncover the mental, emotional and physical reactions of the students and the faculty to the lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic with an intent to map and understand to some extent the social impact of the same.

The Mode, Material and Method

As stated above the objective of the study, therefore, was to understand the mental, emotional and physical reactions of the students and the faculty of Salesian College to the lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic as well as its social impact.

It was a 4 week observational longitudinal study which started on 28th March 2020 and ended on 24th April 2020. The participants were selected using Snowball sampling technique through an online survey. Total 612 students and 97 faculty participated in the 1st week; 642 students and 82 faculty participated in the 2nd week; 474 students and 77 faculty participated in the 3rd week; 346 students and 92 faculty participated in the 4th week. The link of the questionnaire was sent through Google forms, LMS Moodle (an in house learning management system) platform of the college¹⁴ and by emails to the faculty and students of Salesian College, Sonada and Siliguri. On receiving and clicking the link the participants got auto directed to the information about the study. First, they filled up the demographic details and then a set of questions appeared sequentially which the participants were to answer. Consent was sought and taken separately from all the participants.

The online self-reported questionnaire developed by investigators was divided into two sections: a) demographic details, b) opinion regarding COVID-19 lockdown. Section b) had 20 questions which the participants were to rate on 5 point scale from completely agree to completely disagree.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Learning and Management Software (LMS).

SPSS 25 was the tool used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics has been used in this study to analyse the findings.

Pandemic Perceptions

This section brings together the selective summary of the data assessed from the questionnaire answered by the participants over the weeks both as descriptive analysis as well as in graphic format. The first sub section contains the selected 7 questions out of the 20 questions on which the student responses had a significant impact statement to make. The second subsection contains similarly the four questions out of the 20 based on which an indirect assumption could be drawn regarding the psycho-social impact under study.

The Student Data

As mentioned earlier, number of students who participated in week 1 were 612, week 2 were 642, week 3 were 474 and week 4 were 346. The mean age of students was 19.67 (± 1.58) years.

Majority of students felt bored during lockdown. This claim is substantiated by the findings that show 17.8% of students in week 1 completely agreeing and 39.2% agreeing to the proposition posed to them. During week 2, the responses to agree and completely agree, in this regard, were 40.7% and 13.7% respectively. During week 3, the figures continued to be 40.3% and 14.8% as those who agreed and completely agreed with regard to feeling of boredom. In the last week instead, those who agree decreased to 35.5% and completely agree increased to 16.8%. On the other hand, students who during the same time recorded 24.5%, 26.9%, 25.7% and 28.3% for Week 1, Week 2, Week 3 and week 4 as having disagreed with the question. There has been a gradual fall in students response from those who were undecided from 14.1% (week1), 12% (week 2), to 12% (week3) to 12.7% (W4). It is evident from the responses that students were anxious about their family and future. For all the 4 weeks, agree and completely agree were high i.e. in week 1, 48% and 27.6%, during week 2, 48.9% and 23.1%, and week 3, 47.5% and 25.1%,

in week 4 49.7% and 23.4% respectively. As opposed to this only a small percentage of respondents i.e. 2.61 % (week 1), 2.22% (week 2), 3.01% (week 3) and 2.60% (week 4) have completely disagreed to the question. The data shows that very few disagree with the question. The undecided responses were 15.7%, 14.8%, 16.2%, and 15.2% from week 1 to week 4 respectively. Majority of the students have agreed that they feel good about spending more time with their family in all weeks, i.e. in week 1 completely agree 40.7% and agree 49.3%, in week 2, 38% (completely agree) and 49.8% (agree), 33.3%, 53.8%, 34.4% & 53.8% respectively in week 3 and 4. The responses indicate that most of the students have been upset due to inability to meet their friends. The percentage of those who agree and completely agree throughout the 4 weeks are 42.8% and 24% (week 1), 43.6% and 17.3% (week 2), 45.6% & 16.7% (week 3) and lastly in week 4, 44.8% and 18.2%. The responses also illustrate that in all the 4 weeks a major percentage of the students have agreed that they are unhappy to be forced to abstain from many activities, which they enjoyed. Highest percentage in week 1, 42.2% agree. As the week progresses the responses of the students who agree are 40.8%, 37.6% and 37.3% respectively. The figures clearly show that the majority of the students have either agreed or completely agreed that they are worried about the economic impact of the pandemic. During week 1 completely agree and agree are 29.2% & 43% respectively. The percentage of agree and completely agree in the other weeks are 42.2% and 27.1% (week 2), 43.7% and 24.3% (week 3) and week 4, 43.9%, 28.3%. The figures do show us that each week the highest percentage of respondents have agreed on being obsessed with washing hands and using sanitizers, i.e. 45.1%, 43.9%, 46.6% & 45.7% respectively. Students are agreeing that they are anxious in mixing with others. 39.5% have agreed in week 1 and 37.9%, 38.6% and 37.3% have agreed respectively in the other 3 weeks.

The Faculty Data

The total number of faculty who participated in week 1 were 97,

week 2 were 82, week 3 were 77 and week 4 were 92. The mean age of faculty was 30.17 (\pm 9.25) years.

Majority of faculty were anxious about their family and future. Percentage of those who completely agree and agree in week 1 are 34.02% and 45.36%. However as the weeks progress the figures record an increase. The percentage of the faculty who agree are 51.22% , 46.75% and 54.3% respectively. Results also illustrate that in all the 4 weeks a major percentage of the faculty have completely agreed and agreed on being worried about economic impact of pandemic. Percentages of completely agree and agree in all of the weeks are 32.99%, 44.33%; 30.49%, 47.56%; 28.57%, 55.84%; and 26.09%, 48.91% respectively. The figures show that in each week highest percentage of participants have agreed that they are obsessed with washing hands or using hand sanitizer, i.e. 35.05%, 40.24%, 33.77% and 38.04 % respectively. Majority of faculty have also agreed that they are anxious about mixing with other than family members. In week 1 percentage of completely agree and agree are 13.40% and 25.77%. As the weeks progress this percentage can be seen to rise, i.e. 48.78%, 45.45%, and 53.26 % have agreed respectively.

Graphical description of student data: week 1 to week 4

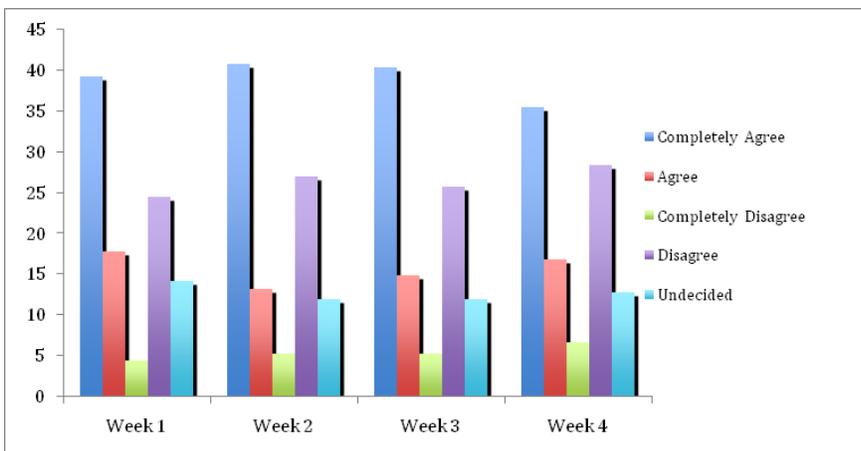


Figure 1: Question 1, Lockdown due to COVID-19 has made life boring

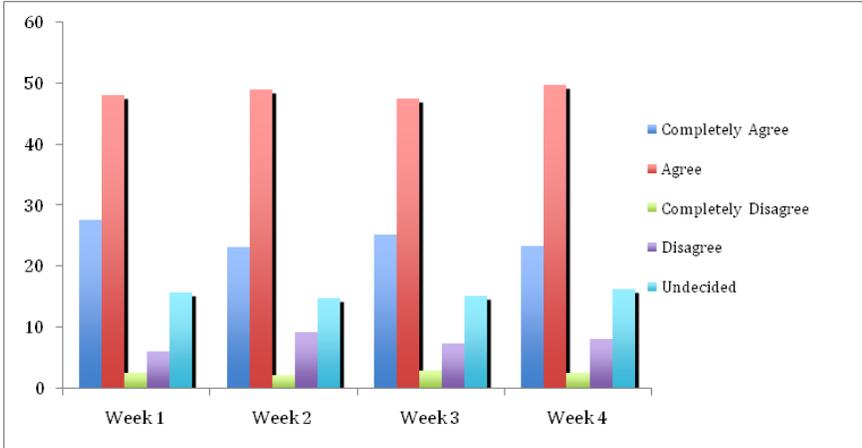


Figure 2: Question 2, I feel anxious about my family and future

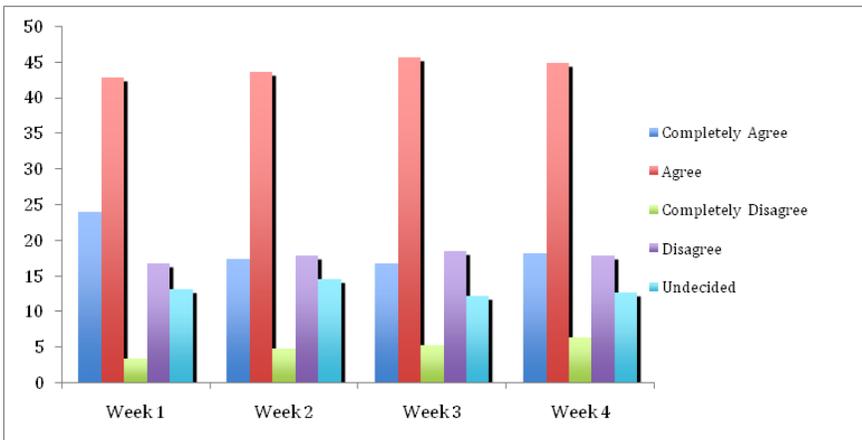


Figure 3: Question 3, Inability to meet my friends is making me very upset

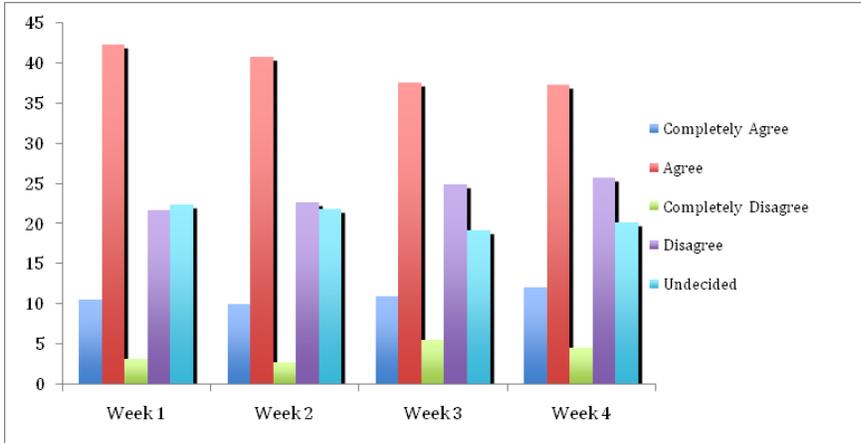


Figure 4: Question 4, Being forced to abstain from many activities I enjoyed is making me unhappy

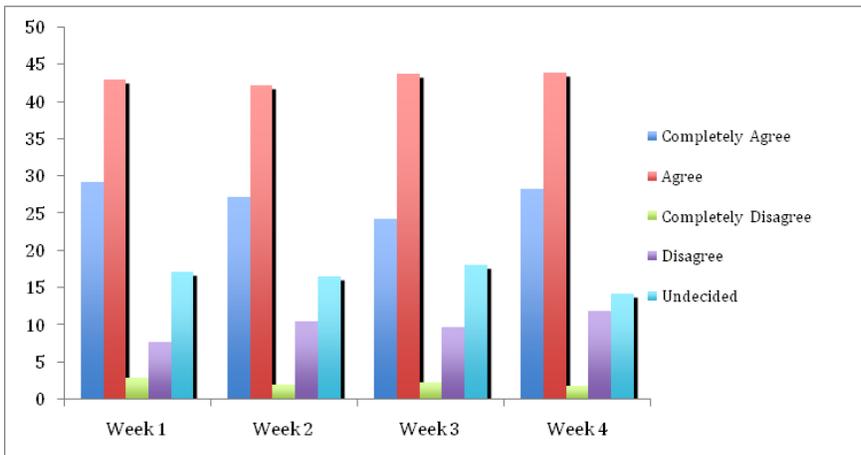


Figure 5: Question 5, I am worried about the economic impact it will have on my family

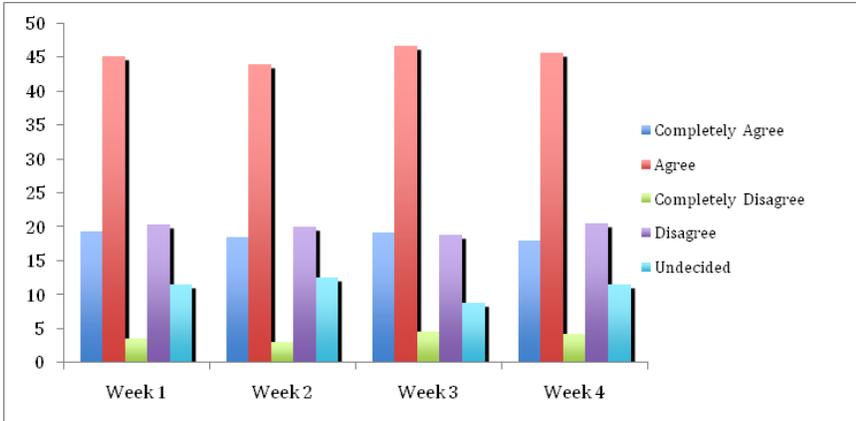


Figure 6: Question 6, COVID-19 makes me obsessed with washing hands or using hand sanitizer.

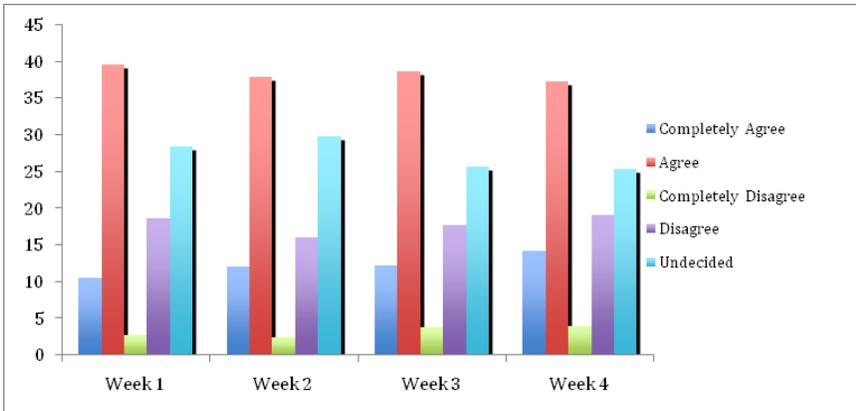


Figure 7: Question 7, I am anxious about mixing with other than family members

Graphical Description of Faculty Data: week 1 to week 4

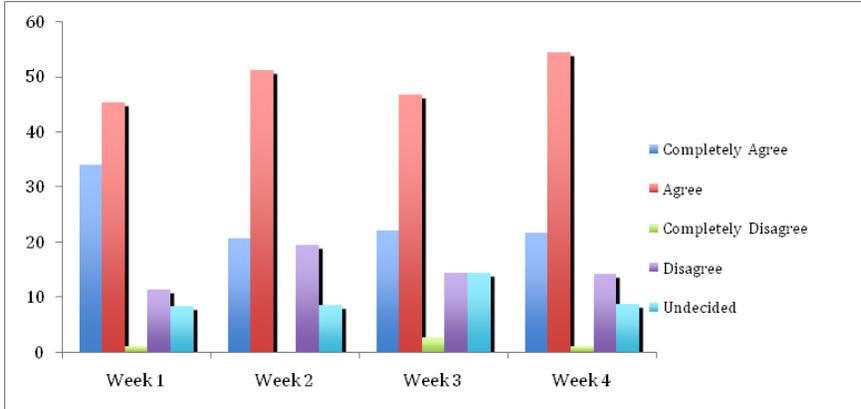


Figure 1: Question 1, I feel anxious about my family and future

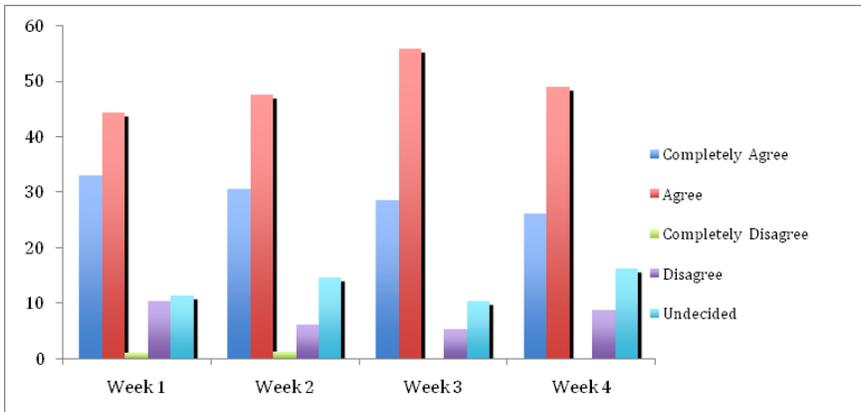


Figure 2: Question 2, I am worried about the economic impact it will have on my family

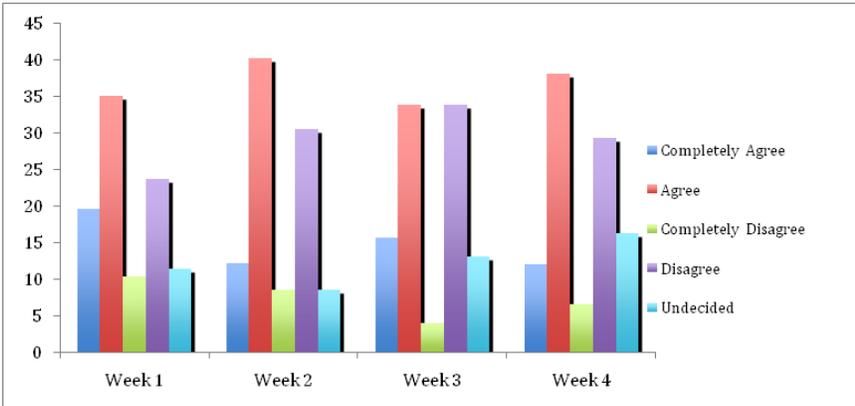


Figure 3: Question 3, COVID-19 makes me obsessed with washing hands or using hand sanitizer.

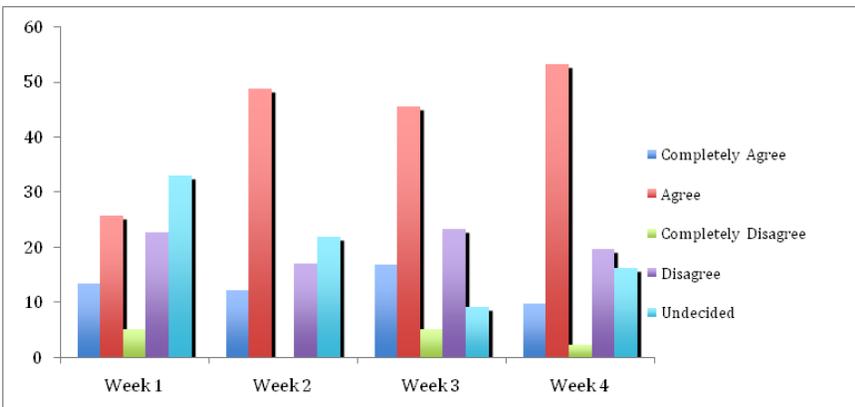


Figure 4: Question 4, I am anxious about mixing with other than family members

Where Does the Pandemic Leave Us?

The journey of life is not necessarily to be measured – neither in terms of the personal perceptions of highs and lows nor in terms of the collective perceptions of rainbows and sunshine that appear and disappear on its horizons. Our life might apparently seem to have come to a sort of standstill due to COVID-19 pandemic. With unproven hypotheses of the nature of the impact – short term or long term – and with insufficient data to assess the situation has

plunged humankind into uncertainty. Individuals—those affected and those in its vicinity—are not only battling the pandemic as a vicious threat lurking outside the self ‘somewhere’, but also as an invasive phenomenon with its own power to mutate and mutilate from within.

In this situation students can be seen as the most anguished as their interactions in-presence classes, sports activities and other opportunities to socialize remain restricted. The result of this study reveals that majority of students felt bored during lockdown. Boredom is an unpleasant emotional state¹⁵ and can be explained as the aversive experience of wanting, but being unable to engage in a satisfying activity. Boredom can be associated with both low-arousal and high-arousal state. At times, boredom breeds lethargy, in other situations being bored can lead to an agitated restlessness. It is more commonly associated with negative outcomes for individuals and society, such as attention problems, reduced motivation and effort, poor performance, withdrawal from work and sometimes feeling of depression.¹⁶ Therefore, when students feel bored over a long period of time, it can hamper their mental health (sense of wellbeing) and that in turn affect their general overall performance.

It can be conclusively asserted from this study that a relatively higher percentage of students as well as faculty have concerns bordering on low to high levels of anxiety about their family (especially husband/wife, siblings and parents) and regarding their future in relation especially to economic welfare for faculty and in relation to job opportunities for students. Conditions like the present lockdown affect all aspects of life: social, economic and political in ways that intermesh and unleash aspects of coerciveness that threaten the hitherto known camaraderie of sociality. Therefore, it is natural and to an extent inevitable to become anxious.

¹⁵ S.W. Bench and H.C. Lench, “On the function of boredom”, *Behavioural Sciences* 3, 3(2013): 459-472. [https://doi : 10.3390/bs3030459](https://doi.org/10.3390/bs3030459).

¹⁶ VanHooft and M. Van Hoff, “The State of boredom: Frustrating or depressing?”, *Motivation and Emotion* 42, 6(2018): 931-946. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9710-6>

Although the lockdown has altered the lives of many people, one cannot deny the fact that it has brought families together too. In this study most of the participants both students and faculty have agreed that they feel good about spending more time with their family. Most of the parents working from home and students taking online classes, can now spend quality time together. Simultaneously faculty who spend at least 7-8 hours in their workplace and those who were away from their homes for teaching purpose, COVID-19 has provided them opportunities to spend more time at home. However, the benefit over a long term period is yet to be ascertained, as it could unleash some dynamics of intra family co-existence that might get upset, redefining the roles and the implications and presence-absence from each other's proximity.

Besides, the study also shows that students are unhappy because they are forced to stay at home and unable to do many activities they enjoy. In the long run they may feel upset due to this factor and it might negatively affect their performance.

Present study reveals that both the students and faculty are worried about the economic impact of the pandemic. The rise in prices as a result of the pandemic has hit everybody hard.¹⁷ During the lockdown, an estimated 14 crore (140 million) people have lost employment while salaries were cut for many others. These are but small indications of the deep economic stress in varying degrees that cannot be denied.

All the participants both students and faculty have agreed on being obsessed with washing hands and using sanitizer. Obsessive compulsive disorder are commonly viewed as germophobic and excessive cleaners who compulsively wash their hands— could be victims. The same or a similar behaviour are now encouraged in order to lower one's risk of infection

¹⁷ M. Buheji *et.al.*, "The Extent of COVID-19 Pandemic Socio-Economic Impact on Global Poverty. A Global Integrative Multidisciplinary Review", *American Journal of Economics*, 4(2020): 213-224.
<http://journal.sapub.org/economics>

and to prevent spreading of COVID-19 leaving other side effects on self and society. The fear of contamination could thus not only become an obsession but also could be the inducer for anxiety. Nonetheless, these compulsions might indeed serve to safeguard the self not merely in corporeal terms.¹⁸

MacIver opines that, “society is the web of social relationships” and that social interactions or the communication between two or more individuals act as the building blocks of society.¹⁹ While these assumptions hold good for normal times, the pandemic has brought about unforeseen changes with the prescriptive injunctions on social-distancing for the purposes of safety. Social interaction which has always been the basis for the functioning of society has now come to a halt and people are anxious for mixing with others, they are maintaining distance from others. In the present study also majority of the participants did confirm the socially restricted mode of interactions as having come into operation in their daily routine. These newly introduced practices of social isolation and associated anxiety could eventually lead to the emergence of the feelings of loneliness in the near future.

The above summation of the present study highlights that although the pandemic brought families together, the psychological and social impact on students and faculty are more than what is immediately evident. Faculty seem better prepared to cope with the present situation with the economic fallout—long term and short term—being their major concern. The impact of lockdown is more substantial on students as they relish college life and peer association—and the very routine they had to relinquish in these times. This study clearly shows that while students have been ignoring direct questions related to depression they have been less reticent in answering the indirect questions revealing

¹⁸ F. Aardema, “COVID-19, obsessive-compulsive disorder and invisible life forms that threaten the self”, *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders* 26, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jocrd.2020.100558>

¹⁹ Maciver and C.H. Page, *Society: An Introductory Analysis*, (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1974).

that they do suffer from anxiety and are upset. However, they are trying to cope by engaging with some activities like learning new things through internet. What surfaces from this study is that the underlying anxiety needs to be taken care of as they are vulnerable to develop psychiatric disorders like depression, and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Conclusion

By way of bringing this study and the present paper to a close we could look first, at the limitations of the study. One of the limitations of this study has been the decrease in the number of participants as the study progressed. It would have been better had there been a better consistency in the number and as regards the same participants responding every week.²⁰ In not succeeding to pursue the survey – apply the same to students and faculty – for another month that would have strengthened the arguments and the data – could be considered as a limitation. This latter is indeed a limitation that can still be overcome, by restricting the survey to those who have been consistent in the first phase for all of the four weeks.

It is a fact that COVID-19 has almost turned our world upside down. We were forced to change or give up many habits we have developed during our life time and quickly adopt totally to new ways of behaviour. During this pandemic we were made aware of the need to look after our physical health but not sufficient emphasis was given to mental health as is evident from the survey. While signs of wear and tear in physical health is easily identifiable, mental health is much more difficult to spot and even more difficult to treat with all the stigma and taboos attached to it in our society. But it is essential that in this situation, people in general and students in particular give importance to looking after and promoting mental health. And the survey clearly indicates that students are more vulnerable.

²⁰ 24 faculty members answered the questionnaire for all four weeks; 30 faculty members answered for three weeks and 27 answered for two weeks.



Image credit: BBC News India

Will the Circus come to town? : Indian Circus Arts swinging between a Kafka moment and a *nouveau* moment

Anmol Mongia

Circuses in India and elsewhere are both an art form and a life tool. As most observers of the Indian Circus are sounding its death knell, this article explores if there is still hope of revival for the once esteemed performing art form.

Franz Kafka in his short story “The Hunger Artist” (1922) describes the transition of a performance that would hold its audiences spellbound at a time, into one that no longer amuses people. In those earlier times, the hunger artist would exhibit his fasting for forty days, stationed inside a cage lined with straw and wardens to ensure he doesn’t eat secretly, and people would watch him with excitement day after day. “In better times, hunger performances could be displayed as a self-sufficient sensation in the world’s largest venues” but Kafka writes that “during these last decades, the interest in hunger artists has markedly diminished.”¹

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. by Wieland Hoban, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 69.

With the decline in public interest in hunger art, Kafka's artist figure, "after some vain attempts to revive the dying genre," decided to join a large circus.² At the circus his cage and his emaciated self became the site of a mere passing glance of the crowds with shorter attention spans, who had come to witness the spectacle of acrobatic performances and wild animals. Kafka's artist carried a heavy heart for "he was working honestly, but the world was cheating him of his reward...[and] [c]oncealed among his straw, he set records that went unnoticed."³

The irony is that in this piece, we are talking of the circus that once enthralled and overshadowed other arenas of arts and entertainment itself becoming a dying art form. Around the world, the lights are going out in the circus rings.⁴ American Barnum and Bailey Ringling Bros staged their last show in 2017 – after staging for 146 years – owing to the dropping sales and viewership. The Great Bombay Circus (GBC), one of the oldest troupes of India is going to mark its centenary year in 2020, admits to having a tough time running its shop.⁵ GBC used to rent the ground from Southern Railways and every time they arrive in Chennai now, the ground shrinks in size, 'I'm not sure if there will be any ground left in a few years to hold a circus'⁶ laments the managing partner and promoter of the company, KM Sanjeev. There are no takers of their art. This is the case with most circuses in India. Juggling, trapeze act, tightrope walking, clown show, acrobatics, daredevilry of sword swallowing, motorcycle stunts no longer hold the interest of a public that has many digitised avenues of entertainment accessible to them.

Decline through bans: First animals and then children

For many of us in urban India, the term Circus awakens childhood memories of being seated in a large tent and finding entertainment

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 70.

⁴ <https://thewire.in/culture/great-bombay-circus>.

⁵ <https://www.thehindu.com/society/circus-is-about-to-go-extinct-in-india/article30514120.ece>.

⁶ Ibid.

by gazing at a lion being controlled by a ringmaster for the first time, or an elephant's balancing act on a small table would bring the awe. In 1991, the environment ministry banned the training and performance of wild animals—lions, tigers, panthers, monkeys, bears and bulls—the major crowd drawing elements of Indian circuses. The ban served a major blow to the circus businesses in the country. Owing to the ban and competition from the modern entertainment industry, it has been documented that the number of circus companies has dropped from 300 in 1990 to about 30 at present, and falling still. Most troupes in India, these days, showcase performances by trained dogs, camels, horses, macaws and cockatoos but the ministry, in 2018 passed the proposal to ban all animals from circus performances as the animal rights campaign against circuses mounted.

In 2011, the Indian Supreme Court ordered a ban on employment of children below 14 years of age to perform or be employed with circus companies. The Supreme Court bench, in response to the petition by Nobel peace prize winner Kailash Satyarthi led NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan, directed that raids be conducted in circus companies and children be liberated.⁷ The petition argued that children working in circuses underwent exploitative labour, sexual abuse, bondage and slavery. Major circuses faced a crunch in performers following the ban. The ban has made little sense for an art form which depends on artists who are moulded into their talents from a very young age.

First animals and then children, the Indian circus fraternity faced its fateful moment at the time of the ruling. Governments, over the decades have shown reduced recognition and withdrawn support from the circus industry. The Circus Owner's Federation and the Circus Employees' Union filed a petition against the animal ban ruling and argued that the order threatened the lives of around 40,000 animal trainers/caretakers/handlers/performers.⁸ It also

⁷ P.R. Nisha, "Children and the Indian Circus," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, 33 (2011): 23-25. Accessed September 26, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23017839>.

⁸ Ibid.

argued that a century old historical tradition of animal training and performance was being threatened. However, none of the animal trainers and other related professionals were compensated. With the ban on employment of children, complex debates surfaced regarding the status of working children.⁹ While circuses around the world are facing bans on animal performances, most continue to employ children who undertake important professional roles in big shows. Moreover, circus is an art form that takes years of dedicated practicing, through daily rigorous routines. The answer to the question—should children be allowed to be professionals of an art form that requires living a challenging regimen and giving death defying performances, may seem simple to contemporary readership most of whom agree that childhoods must be protected. However, it is a complex answer if one perceives the matters from behind the curtain of a circus.

The journey of the Big Top from the Traditional to the New

Traditionally, circus has been an itinerant art form, involving troupes making tours around the world to set up their show. Circuses in most parts of the world continue to be composed of families that travel together with crew and menagerie, and perform together. Children are brought up in nomadic lifestyles and practice routines consistent with those of their parents. But in most of Europe, *nouveau* circus or 'new circus' has largely replaced the traditional itinerant circus. France, for instance still boasts of an ever growing and evolving circus culture and is spearheading the face of the new circus with the advent of circus schools. Circus schools have opened up the circus world to outsiders, which in its traditional form did not offer opportunities to those who didn't belong to circus families. New Circus, as it has come to be called, takes traditional circus skills and redefines them. The changes in elements such as venue, costume and music accompanied by artistic use of more everyday objects as props and innovative performances at newly created festivals¹⁰ has given the art form in the region a renaissance. And

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰[https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/a-brief-history-of-Salesian-Journal-of-Humanities-and-Social-Sciences,XI\(2020\)2:119-124](https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/a-brief-history-of-Salesian-Journal-of-Humanities-and-Social-Sciences,XI(2020)2:119-124)

most importantly, New Circus doesn't have to be performed under a big tent, and there are never animals involved.¹¹

In India, however, the Circus has had a different trajectory. Originally it followed the model of the British and European circuses of the late 19th century but from the 1920s to 60s, most Indian circus performers came from the state of Kerala trained in the indigenous martial art form *Kalaripayattu* (*Kalari*). The Circus offered an alluring prospect to people from socially and economically backward communities of the region (Skidmore 2014, 221).¹² True to its nature elsewhere, circus in India too became a space offering a community to people. The same discriminatory practices facing lower castes or minority religious communities in Indian society were not found at the circus. (An exception exists in the form of the nomadic group of acrobats, entertainers and jugglers called *Bazigars* and *Natshailing* mostly from the North Indian states of Punjab and Haryana) As it began to draw participants from across India, and later from Nepal, the Circus grew as a form of entertainment. Most who joined the circus were from lower social strata with poor economic conditions. Many children from such struggling families were joining the circus from Nepal, Assam, Meghalaya, Bengal. And this is still the case.

Challenges facing Indian Circus

Indian Circus is still an itinerant and nomadic affair. Here, the circus business is fraught with challenges of huge overhead costs of travelling with crew, animals and equipment. The artists live on alarmingly little rest and recovery time as they perform back to back shows. And although it is an art form that thrives on its quality to play with danger, it has been argued that Indian circuses make children perform the same dangerous stunts that adults perform like fire-breathing act that is performed by adults, teens and children in most Indian circuses. The Indian Circus landscape has also been

the-circus-in-france/.

¹¹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20170221-circus-france-ever-growing-art-form>.

¹² Jamie Skidmore, "Defying Death: Children in the Indian Circus", in *Entertaining Children The Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry*, edited by Gillian Arrighi and Victor Emeljanow, (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2014), 219-234.

accused of giving paltry wages, child beating and routine sexual harassment of girls and women. The list is long and many may find themselves stuck in the profession as they have no other skills to earn a living, while yet others, like Kafka's artist, want to perform for the love of performance but the world remains indifferent to their craft.

For many within and outside of the Circus community, the stage of the circus holds an extraordinary appeal that no other platform can substitute for. Some of these are veterans who have spent their entire lives in the industry and others who are growing up aspiring to be part of it. Scholars have argued that if the State wants circus acrobatics to survive in this part of the world, they should work towards revival by building a circus "safe" environment that nurtures artists. A structural change aside, adequate training academies and a system of formal education should be introduced for child circus artists who want to grow in the field.

If we go by the latest reports on Indian Circus arts, its future looks very bleak as it appears to reach the tail end of its career. However, its revival is possible if we believe the optimism brewing in the work of Aditya Shah and Sugandhan Ashokan who want to transform the Indian circus industry by bringing live circus shows to mobile phones through an OTT streaming platform. Seeing the miserable conditions of stranded circus crews during the Covid-19 lockdown, they ran a crowd funding campaign and raised Rs 1 crore to support various crews struggling to make ends meet in different parts of the country. Soon, they began to study international circuses and charted their pivots.¹³ They are finalizing the script of a documentary¹⁴ which will chart the journey of Indian circus, along with boosting the presence of circuses on social media. Who knows, with the digital revolution and immersive technologies, the *nouveau* moment of Indian Circus may be just around the corner.

¹³ <https://www.livemint.com/news/business-of-life/now-streaming-the-great-indian-circus-11596103480298.html>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Boredom, time and the creative self during a lockdown

Vasudeva K. Naidu

Boredom has always been an integral part of human life but it seems it acquired a renewed meaning during this pandemic. The global lockdown that was brought about and is still prevalent in most parts of the world till date, confined the individual self to a particular space, bringing the 'human' in terms of interaction and socialisation to a grinding halt. This boredom which started out as either a result or a lack of a specific activity – has acquired a new depth as one continues to find one's self confined to a particular space and within a fractured sense of clock time, which the modern self was not privy to.

Ideally boredom in essence can have a short lifespan, regurgitating whenever an opportunity presents itself and in turn leading to a particular action to quell it – by the individual. But this kind of boredom is different from boredom that doesn't have a temporal nature, the kind that wells from deep within. It is of an existential kind that connects itself to one's very being, a persisting *ennui* of life itself. This kind of boredom doesn't come as a result of an activity or lack of it. It is not a result of idleness in general but rather of a particular kind of idleness – an idleness that isn't temporal in nature and as a result has lost the ability to invoke any meaning. In other words, this kind of boredom generates its own form of idleness. At this point, the brooding lines of Shakespeare's Hamlet come to mind, "how weary, stale, flat and unprofitable/ seem to me all the uses of the world". Hamlet's conundrum with action or the lack of it, in this case, avenging his father, never takes off. Hamlet is deeply bored and hence remains idle. One is led to believe that Hamlet's failure to understand his fears and anxieties leads to his affliction with torpidity, both mentally and physically – an emotional or a spiritual stasis which cannot be remedied by any particular activity or human interaction. Hamlet's idleness in essence can resonate with this lockdown induced idleness. An idleness that has lost its

ability to generate meaning. The repression or the inability to make sense of the lockdown induced anxieties and fears have led to a kind of emotional and spiritual paralysis. In the words of Eliot, “like a patient etherized upon a table.”

Never before had the ‘self’ felt trapped in a particular space with an indefinite sense of time weighing heavily. Never before had the ‘self’ generated this kind of idleness. And never before had one turned to technology to try and quell it. Technology has in a specific sense during the lockdown become a crutch to treat boredom induced by a specific activity or the lack of it. It’s no wonder that sites like Zoom and Netflix had a rebounded surge in their user capacity. Studies have shown that there has been a sudden rise in internet usage for both work and entertainment purposes. While this seems inevitable, where technological innovations always find a way to fill the gap of need and desire, it is vital to note how deeply enmeshed technology is with the human condition. One has to go back to Heidegger’s writings on boredom and its collusion with technology that characterises most of the postmodern life; to understand these forces that structure contemporary life, hence finding a renewed relevance during this global lockdown induced by the pandemic. Heidegger’s work suggests that:

The drive for endless economic growth and technological innovation that characterizes much postmodern life is but a product of boredom with the human condition and its worldly limitations. Technology feeds off this mood of boredom and at the same time suppresses the very opportunity for its overcoming. The collusion between technology and boredom, Heidegger warns, undermines the practice of philosophy and the human task- inherently political in nature- of discovering a home in the world.¹

Nietzsche looked at boredom as the driving force for the growth of morality and religion among “majority of mortals.” For him, ascetic practices and ideals acted as “chief weapon” in combating boredom, while art and scholarly engagement acted as substitutes for the same endeavor. Yet in a ‘postmodern’ world, it seems they

¹ Leslie Paul Thiele, “Postmodernity and the routinization of novelty: Heidegger on boredom and technology,” *Polity* 29, 4 (1997): 489-517.

all have lost their lustre. Today a more efficient way it seems is outright consumption—an ever-growing heap of gadgets. This applies to the consumers of entertainment as well. During this lockdown the online portals for watching films and electronic content have been constantly pumped with new material to keep the ever fickle attentiveness of the consumer intact. But this only takes care of the superficial boredom which in turn breeds a new form of idleness. “One of the chief products of Western economic growth and its heightened consumption is a society characterized by the abundance of boredom and the boredom with abundance.”²

This lockdown defined and redefined the silver lining between isolation and solitude, boredom and productivity, clock time and a fractured sense of time. Aristotle is the first we are aware of, to whom time is the measurement of change. Things change continually and the counting of this change is attributed to time, for him. This need for change, a constant shift of events, symbolized the clock time induced fast paced life, which came to a grinding halt with the global lockdown. This halt reaffirmed the once intermittent connection between boredom and the passage of time to something more concrete, a stasis of deep boredom.

But, in the heavy bouts of a fractured sense of time there can be moments for the ‘self’ to find itself. This is not a new idea. Literature is replete with names like Montaigne, Rousseau, Thoreau, Dostoyevsky, and others who have explored this in their writings. It is difficult to forget the narrator of Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* whose confessional rhetoric lays bare the disturbing inner workings of a bitter recluse.

To reiterate Nietzsche, art or the act of creation in any form can bridge the gap between stasis and meaningful activity. In other words, it can add sail to a ship standing still in waters, symbolising an albatross in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

The inclusion of the factor of time or rather the sense of time, with regard to isolation or solitude seems relevant in understanding

² Ibid, 495.

art in these conditions (the condition of deep boredom). If one argues that art is a representation or expression of the inner and the external that surrounds the artist then this bubble of perception has to operate in consonance with one's sense of time. To go further, this bubble will shrink and possibly change colour in isolation as a result of the lack of intensity in terms of change surrounding time.

While some artists like Louise Bourgeois might argue that isolation helps in keeping their creativity intact and original, others like Hemingway might have a different take on it. Either way, the point remains that lack of social contact and a repressed sense of change stunts the perceived sense of passing of time in isolation.

I am reminded of the protagonist from Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Nikolai Rubashov whose seemingly indefinite sessions of intermittent tortures in the prison where he was denied sleep and was subjected to a constant blindfold of bright light during interrogations and the oppressive silence of his solitary cell, only heightened his need to write:

During the first few days Rubashov had looked for familiar faces, but found none. That relieved him: for the moment he wanted to avoid any possible reminder of the outside world, anything which might distract him from his task. His task was to work his thoughts to a conclusion, to come to terms with the past and future, with the living and the dead. He had still ten days left of the term set by Ivanov.³

This sense of purpose to create in an oppressive (in the case of Rubashov) or isolatory (with regard to a pandemic in the real sense) might be fastidious for some while for others a disintegrating experience. What is interesting in both the cases is the possibility of an individual coming closer to one's self and /or discovering an 'I'. Koestler's description of Rubashov's 'I' with regard to time and isolation certainly seems apt in this regard:

Now, when he stood with his forehead against the window or suddenly stopped on the third black tile, he made unexpected discoveries. He

³ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at noon: A novel*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), 67.

found out that those processes wrongly known as “monologues” are really dialogues of a special kind; dialogues in which one partner remains silent while the other, against all grammatical rules, addresses him as “I” instead of “you”, in order to creep into his confidence and to fathom his intentions; but the silent partner just remains silent, shuns observation and even refuses to be localized in time and space.⁴

Moving on from literary examples, there exist a score of artists who produced their best work in isolation. Of course, in many cases isolation can be a choice like in the case of the painter Alfred Wallis, who is known to notoriously seclude himself to paint from memory. While for others, geographical, political or biological factors forcefully determine one’s tryst with creating art in isolation. Apart from the classic examples of Munch and Van Gogh, Frida Kahlo stands out as someone who produced magnificent work while being confined to bed due to injury and illness. Kahlo’s predicament won’t apply to most in the current lockdown, but her mental state might be a different story. Being confined to a particular space (which one might even call ‘home’) leaves one like Koeslter’s Rubashov in a need to create, to break the vortex of deep boredom.

The epistemological variants of this pandemic induced lockdown might have different interpretations. Only time will tell! But regardless, some of the concerns shared by philosophers like Heidegger in lieu with technology might find a new resonance, while for artists like Kahlo, regardless of the merit of the work, when the need is to turn an experience imbued with isolation into something that resonate solitude, the ship with a sail still holds as a right metaphor.

⁴ Ibid, 79.

Book Review

Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2004), Rs. 1585, Pages 288, pbk, (ISBN 1570270597).

Shruti Sharma

To understand the socio-political significance of Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (hereafter, *Caliban*), one must go back to the 'Wages for Housework' campaigns in the 1970's. The campaign was a transnational social movement which battled for a salary for housework, given its strategic importance to the capitalist economy through the reproduction of the next generation of workers and the care of the current generation with no direct cost to the State or the market.¹ In 1975, Federici produced a "revolutionary" pamphlet titled "Wages against Housework" challenging the pillars on which the patriarchy of wage rests which dealt with how women are socialized to become *good* wives who provide a "labour of love."² In 1984, she co-authored the book *The Great Caliban: History of the Rebel Body in the First Phase of Capitalism* with Leopoldina Fortunati which examined the reorganization of housework, family life, child raising, sexuality and male-female relations during sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. *Caliban* deals with similar ideas but differs in its scope as it focuses on a different period in history, that of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the Preface, Federici also connects her arguments to the contemporary changes she witnesses during her stay in Nigeria. As she writes:

In Nigeria I realized that the struggle against structural adjustment is part of a long struggle against land privatization and the "enclosure" not only of communal lands but also of social relations that stretches back to the origin of capitalism in 16th-century Europe and America (p.9).

¹ Patrick Cuninghame, "Italian feminism, workerism and autonomy in the 1970s", *Amnis* 8, 2008. <http://journals.openedition.org/amnis/575>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/amnis.575>

² Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, (Bristol: Power of Women Collection and Falling Wall Press, 1975).

The title is a reference to the characters of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Situating *The Tempest*, Valdivieso writes that in all probability Shakespeare was influenced by papers of the Virginia Company describing a shipwreck off the Bermudas in 1609 and it is generally acknowledged that travel literature connected with the New World was one of the major influences on his plays.³ Caliban, an anti-colonial *rebel* in seventeenth century Americas represents the proletarian body which becomes the sight of resistance to capitalism. The body undergoes radical ideological transformation brought about by Descartes and Hobbes, from a body viewed as a "receptacle of magical powers" (p.141) to a mechanical tool devoid of reason which produced "the human body...the first machine developed by capitalism" (p.146). The figure of the Witch, who in *The Tempest* is Caliban's mother, refers to the world of female subjects that capitalism had to exterminate – "the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeha woman who poisoned the master's food and inspired the slaves to revolt" (p.11).

Federici retells the history of "transition" from feudalism to capitalism from the viewpoint of women, the body and primitive accumulation, amalgamating these three ideas to provide a perspective that mainstream history has missed out. She reworks Marx's conception of primitive accumulation, and Foucault's analysis of the power techniques to which the body was subjected by situating women's reproductive labour as primitive accumulation, and highlighting the repressive character of power and the disciplinary techniques (witch-hunts) used by the ruling class to gain control over women's sexuality, leading to the gendered accumulation of their bodies as "unpaid laborers in the home" (p.95). Hence, from the standpoint of women, the "transition" to capitalism doesn't seem progressive or liberative as Marx claimed it to be.

Her account of an alternative history makes clear that the capitalist social and economic system did not directly evolve

³ Sofía Muñoz Valdivieso, "'He hourly humanizes': Transformations and Appropriations of Shakespeare's Caliban", *SederiVII* (1996): 269-272.

from feudalism but in fact was a “response of the feudal lords, the patrician merchants, the bishops and popes” (p.21) to the anti-feudal struggles, curbing the possibilities of an egalitarian social order. The period of transition from the lens of the anti-feudal struggles lays bare the socio-political agenda behind the English enclosures, conquest of Americas and the control over the reproductive power of women, especially through the witch hunts and the discourse of demonology.

Following the experience of Black Death, the ruling class was threatened by a loss of power. As the European peasantry and the urban proletariat gained strength due to the scarcity of labour. This unprecedented power increased their self value as too many employers were competing for their services (p. 46). To invert this, political authorities turned class antagonism into antagonism against proletarian women, by legislating dissensions amongst the united proletariat to decriminalize rape and institutionalize prostitution (p.47). This was the first step to attack women’s sexual freedom. Federici provides an extended version of the strategy used by the ruling class to tackle “deaccumulation” arguing that expropriation and enslavement were not the only means through which the working class was formed and “accumulated”. It required the transformation of the body into a work-machine and also the suppression of women to the reproduction of the work-force (p. 63). The latter could only be done by normalizing the reproductive function women were to play in society, by instilling terror in the psyche of other women through the spectacle of the extermination of witches.

But who really were the witches? The witches were the first practitioners of birth control and abortion (p.206), they were the midwives and “wise women” who were the traditional depository of women’s reproductive knowledge and control (pp. 182-183); witches were mostly old, widowed women or those who lived alone (p.171), negatively affected by land privatization as their families moved to the cities – leaving them to beg in the villages or rely on public assistance; witches were the women who were too independent and did not obey their husbands (p.111).

The witch-hunt was also the first persecution in Europe that made use of a multimedia propaganda to generate a mass psychosis among the population. Alerting the public to the dangers posed by the witches, through pamphlets publicizing the most famous trials and the details of their atrocious deeds, was one of the first tasks of the printing press.

It was a turning point in women's lives and their collective psyche which succeeded in dividing the proletariat and in constructing a new notion of femininity opposed to the demonic women—the witch. A new model of femininity was produced which overlooked the whole world of female practises, collective relations and systems of knowledge that had formed the basis of women's power in pre-capitalist Europe and were essential in them being a part of the peasant revolts and heretic movement against feudalism. This new model was that of an ideal woman defined her relationship to a man—mothers, wives, daughters, widows (p.97)—stripped off her identity as a worker. To be a perfect woman/wife she had to have the qualities of being chaste, passive, obedient, thrifty, of few words, always busy at work, moral and irrational (p.103). An ideological redefinition of the virtues and vices of women was propagated through literature and theatre—masculinity and femininity were constructed as polar opposites and women were portrayed to be inherently inferior to men (p. 100). This process of social engineering strengthened man's control over women's sexuality and reproductive powers.

Peter Linebaugh in his review titled "Torture and Neo liberalism with Sycorax in Iraq" has linked the witch-hunts to the torturing of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prisons asking the pertinent question "Why does torture accompany economic development or primitive accumulation?" He highlights that the unspoken assumption is that the prisoners are not human beings, just the way the witches were demonized in the first phase of capitalism. He writes:

..it is part of a policy to terrorize and to create a new type of human being. It is inherent in both the project of expropriation and the process of exploitation. From the marsh Arabs and the desert tribes:

modern labor power is created by war, religion, and torture. Migration, diaspora, criminalization, pauperization result.⁴

Federici's alternative narrative is an endeavour to link the enclosure of land to the enclosure of women to the houses; to establish a connection between what the factory is to a man and what the body is to a woman; to provide an alternative understanding of alienation from workplace because it is not recognized as one; to show what socialization can do to human beings- setting them apart from realizing their essence; to question the legitimized torture programmes that accompany the expansion of capital; to make us question our normalized behaviour which is a result of activities that happened centuries ago.

Federici also provides a theoretical paradigm by putting Foucault's theory on "accumulation" into Marx's theory of "primitive accumulation". Three conceptual frameworks of Feminism, Foucauldian and Marxian amalgamated gives "all the world a big (needs) jolt"⁵ in their mainstream understanding of the "transition" of feudalism to capitalism.

Corollary to this is Federici's concern about Marx's claim that capitalism was progressive and liberative for the worker, which if viewed from the perspective of taming women's' bodies would seem contradictory. In the article "The Reproduction of Labour Power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution" (2011), Federici states that Marx's analysis of capitalism is incomplete as he fails to envisage value-producing work other than that of commodity production in factories. His ignorance of women's unpaid reproductive work in the process of capitalist accumulation is a sign of "blind spot in patriarchal social theory".

⁴ Peter Linebaugh, "Torture and Neo Liberalism with Sycorax in Iraq", Counter Punch, 2004.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2004/11/27/torture-and-neo-liberalism-with-sycorax-in-iraq/>

⁵ Federici titles her second chapter as "All the World Needs a Jolt" referring to Thomas Muntzer's quote "All the world must suffer a big jolt. There will be such a game that the ungodly will be thrown off their seats, and the downtrodden will rise". (p. 21).

She adds:

Had Marx recognized that capitalism must rely on both an immense amount of unpaid domestic labor for the reproduction of the workforce, and the devaluation of these reproductive activities in order to cut the cost of labor power, he may have been less inclined to consider capitalist development as inevitable and progressive.⁶

(Federici, 2011)

⁶ S. Federici, "The reproduction of labour-power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution", 2010. Retrieved October 22, 2016, from <https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/10/25/silvia-federici-the-reproduction-of-labour-power-in-the-global-economy-marxist-theory-and-the-unfinished-feminist-revolution/>

J. P. Gurung, *All in a Cup of Tea* (Sonada & Siliguri: Salesian College Publications, 2020), Rs 699, pp. xviii+206, Hbk, (ISBN 978-93-82216-19-3).

Samip Sinchuri

Darjeeling in popular discourses has a unique place for its tea. *All in a Cup of Tea* is an insider's account on Darjeeling's Tea Plantations. The author belongs to a family involved in tea management for generations. J.P. Gurung has attempted to throw some insights on the details of the tea gardens in Darjeeling as they stand today. He has shared his personal experiences as a tea planter. In the words of Harsh Vardhan Shringla "...perhaps for the very first time a planter has attempted to piece together history along with his long years of firsthand experience ..." The author has tried to take a peep into the life of a tea planter - his club, his life style and habits with ample anecdotes and hilarious incidents.

In chapter I, "History of Darjeeling Tea" Gurung has vividly given the historical account of how tea seeds were brought from China and introduced in Darjeeling on an experimental basis and subsequent historical trajectory of the plantations. The British got this tract of land from the regional rulers and began to develop the place as an army outpost and also as a place where expatriates could escape from the heat and dust of Gangetic Bengal which was under East India Company (p. 2). Britishers were driven by the prospect for tea business in Darjeeling. The author has also accounted the expansion and growth of the tea plantations starting with the successful tea experimentation to commercial plantation—which had proved to be a profitable venture.

Chapter II, "Darjeeling Tea Gardens Today", Gurung, summarizes the details of the 87 Tea plantations that are currently functioning in Darjeeling. Some details include the geographical location, altitude, date of establishment, name and its local meaning, area covered, production per annum and its proprietors.

Chapter III, "Small Tea Growers in Darjeeling", the author has tried to identify and reveal the existence of small tea growers in

Darjeeling amid the bigger Tea estates. He describes the role played by NGOs, local associations and welfare society in reviving the underperforming tea gardens. The success story of how a small tea grower establishes a fully equipped tea factory is truly inspiring.

Chapter IV, "Tea Cultivators in Darjeeling" elaborates on the origination of the seeds that were brought and planted in Darjeeling by the erstwhile planters. He presents the glimpse of the herculean task of clearing out forests and cultivating tea. Gradually, the planters started experimenting with different the types of tea bushes. In 1967, the Tea Research Association started Clonal Proving and Meteorological Station at Ging Tea Estate, which proved beneficial for the Darjeeling Tea Company. The author has mentioned the details of the clone seeds with their clone types and characteristics unique to the climatic condition of Darjeeling (p.46).

Chapter V, "Darjeeling Tea Planter" deals with the account of some tea planters in Darjeeling with whom the author became familiar during his career as a manager of tea estates. Gurung briefly describes some British planters as well as some of the Indian managers who affiliated themselves with Darjeeling tea industry either from a young age or as a legacy of the preceding planters. The author also shares his personal experiences and his association with the individuals, who played an influential role in popularizing Darjeeling tea globally.

Chapter VI, "Geoffrey James Ower Johnston: A Man I Cannot Forget" is thoroughly dedicated to the person mentioned. Author describes about his working experience and association with Geoffrey. His deep connection to the land and his feelings for the local people has been clearly portrayed by the author. Geoffrey marries a local girl, Manang but later he was obliged by his mother to marry a British woman, Janet. His fondness for Manang was such that before marrying Janet he purchased a villa for her and catered to her financial requirements and created a fund to take care of her in the event of his death (p.75). In 1968, when a landslide had swept the road near Gorabari, the author recounts Geoffrey who was there every single day driving his own bull dozer trying to restore

the road. Geoffrey despite undergoing hard financial crisis tried to manage his tea estate but his tragic death puts everyone at utter dismay.

Chapter VII, “Fr. Luigi Jellici, sdb: A Major Influence in My Life” the author narrates about Luigi Jellici a Salesian priest from Italy as a major source of inspiration in his life. The author was influenced by Christian education and values which he contemplates—have largely contributed to what he has achieved in his life today. Gurung recalls one of the biggest virtues of Jellici was his indomitable positive attitude towards life and his ingenuity had influenced the author deeply. He also narrates couple of memorable incidences that took place when he was travelling with Jellici.

Chapter VIII, “Some Weird Experiences” he further goes on to share two occurrences that he had experienced while driving at night towards Sonada. The author still admits that when he thinks of those incidences at 8th mile jhora and Dilaram he feels the chill running through his spine, even after so many years.

Chapter IX, “The Darjeeling Club Limited (Planters Club)” the author encapsulates how secluded the British planters felt—away from their family, with no friends to keep company. Ergo, the need to socialize, led to the foundation of the Planters Club. He further delineates Planters club, decorative quarter deck & World War I Maxim gun and animal trophies. Meanwhile, he tries to unravel the fons et origo of *abdar*. He discusses the difficulties faced by the club management due to the lack of patronization of club by its members. Further, he discerns that due to the burgeoning of communication and leisure—the need to visit the club and the club as place of respite—gradually became redundant. Therefore, only selected members frequented the club resulting in inadequate revenue and consequently leading to difficulty in maintaining the club and paying staff salaries.

In chapter X, “Workers in Darjeeling Tea Plantations” Gurung describes the importance of labour in the tea industry. He states that without the hard work contributed by the work force, the hostile terrain of Darjeeling probably would not have been converted to the

lush green tea plantations that we see today. Demand of labour is very high in this industry and the author narrates the stories when workers of one garden were stolen and bought to another garden, for doing this the *Sardar* got a commission for each worker he could bring. Tea industry is the largest private sector in generating employment in the country. The author adds, in Darjeeling Tea plantations employment is based on family basis and passes on from parents to child. Since every parent invariably tries to ensure that the children go to school, after some degree of education the younger generations no longer would be interested in menial jobs that their parents have been doing. This has resulted in large numbers of boys and girls moving off to urban areas. Therefore, the author further suggests three important things: i) Need to improve wage structure, ii) A sense of pride and belongingness needs to be installed in the workmen at every level and iii) A system needs to be created where job of a laborer is looked upon with dignity for the survival, and sustenance.

Chapter XI, "Trade Union Movement in Darjeeling Hills", Gurung narrates the formation of Trade Unions in tea plantations of Darjeeling. Initially trade unions in the tea plantations of Darjeeling were considered illegal. The author states that, in fact, confidential reports were maintained by many of the garden managers documenting any union activity reported to them by their 'loyal chowkidars'. 'Darjeeling Tea Workers' Union was formed in 1945. Subsequently, Darjeeling 'District Chia Kaman Shramik Sangh' was formed followed by 'National Union for Plantation Workers'. In 1989 'Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union was established with the formation of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council which was an outcome of the separate statehood movement headed by Subash Ghising. Tea Labour Union in Darjeeling since then got pushed and pulled by political parties and the Unions were broken and merged under different names and banners.

Chapter XII, "Movement for a Separate State" in this chapter the author links the impact of Gorkhaland Movement on Tea Industry in Darjeeling. He also shares episode of 1986 agitation to the

readers. At that instant he was posted as the manager of Gyabaree and Millikthong Tea Estate. He perceptibly reports the brutality of Police after the agitators snivelled the rifle of State Armed Police at Noldara, the repercussion of this incident was massive raids by police in workers line, people from the entire valley being picked up by police and mostly male workers of the garden disappeared after the raids. The maltreatment of Senior Manger of Castleton Tea Estate who was picked and jailed shook the author so much—he divulges to the reader—that he had to go and live in Sikkim for many months (p.123). The author also elucidates on the recent developments on statehood politics of the Darjeeling Hills from 2007 onwards.

Chapter XIII, “China: The Mecca for the Tea Lovers” the author chronicles his visit to China. There he found unlike Darjeeling, tea is not only a culture but is like a religion to the Chinese people. They took pride in making and drinking tea. His travel to China was an eye opener. There he realized the native tea planters in Darjeeling had much more to learn from Chinese regarding tea cultivation. Unlike Darjeeling, in China he found huge areas dedicated specifically for tea market (p.128). The author makes a list of things that he learned from his China trip and compares Darjeeling Tea plantation and marketing with them. He discussed the loopholes and the areas where Darjeeling tea planters could improve.

Chapter XIV, “Protection of Darjeeling Tea” emphasizes on the need to protect Darjeeling Tea under Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act. The author feels that the topography and the climatic condition of the region act as a factor for the distinctive quality and flavor of tea grown in Darjeeling. The allure of Darjeeling tea has won the recognition, patronage and the heart of tea lovers around the world. He raises the concern that large quantity of tea was fraudulently sold in the name of ‘Darjeeling Tea’ (p.133). He asserts, particularly the tea grown in Sri Lanka are packed and marked as ‘Pure Darjeeling Tea’. In this chapter Gurung appeals the need to protect Darjeeling Tea and to ensure that the tea produced under a demarcated geographical area should only

be sold as 'Darjeeling tea'. In the year 2004 Darjeeling Tea became the first product in India to be registered under the Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999.

In Chapter XV, "Darjeeling Tea: Organic Farming" Gurung sets forth that the early plantations were organic. However, with the passage of time there rose a need for the use of chemicals and fertilizers in order to meet the rising demands and thirst to increase tea production. During the late sixties tea bushes in Darjeeling were susceptible to pests and diseases due to the increasing use of chemicals and pesticides. Further, he traces how chemical weeding was the most damaging thing that could ever happen in the history of Darjeeling Tea Industry. The organic farming in Darjeeling started around the late eighties when some tea gardens like Malootar, Sivitar, Nurbung, Singhel and Makaibari decided to grow organic tea. He feels the conversion towards organic farming in Darjeeling is motivated by better price realization as the demand for this kind of tea is increasing. The author remarks that the organic farming must not only be looked as a tool for marketing but as a sound strategy which must be backed by full commitment by all the stakeholders for long term sustainability.

Chapter XVI, "Darjeeling Tea Tourism" as Darjeeling is blessed with beauty of nature. Owing to the influx of people the town got mushroomed and overcrowded. Tourist contempt thronged town and craved for scenic joy. Thus swarming tourists got captivated by peace and tranquility of the tea gardens. The author apprises tea tourism not only provides recreation and a gateway but encompasses the rich experience of learning the culture of tea and its heritage (p.147). Gurung states that the Government approved the Tea Tourism policy in 2013 and in the following years the concept of Tea Tourism was taken up earnestly both by the government and by a section of tea estate owners. About 14 Tea gardens in Darjeeling Hills has converted their Managers bungalow into resorts and are earning the revenue. One can also perceive that home stays have sprung up around the tea garden to serve the needs of the tourist. Such catering improved not only the local economy but many other ancillary industries like transportation and supplies. It has

also provided opportunities for training and employment for local educated boys and girls. While many Tea gardens are finding it difficult to sustain with meager revenues generated by tea alone, the author considers Tea Tourism and Allied Business policy of the government as definite step to boost the tea industry.

The Chapter XVII, "Darjeeling Tea: Quality and Marketing" highlights the problems that the Darjeeling Tea industry is passing through in the current scenario. The author emphasizes on the 'quality of the tea' as one of the important factor which draws the consumers to buy the tea and advocates that the first sip must fire up sensation of muscatel, flowery and fruity flavors which are sweet and smooth and linger on his/her pallet making him/her sit up and say 'Wow'! (p.157). He highlights the need to update the machineries used in the process of tea production. Gurung presumes that the making of Darjeeling tea is an art and the best tea can only be made by those planters who have a passion for perfection. He goes on to tell the readers that the process of making tea starts with the clarity of the concept of quality in the mind of the person making it. It is only then that the planter can mould and fold the other parameters of production to produce the desired tea (p.159).

The author is very delighted to explain in great detail the steps involved in making tea, taking up individual processes elaborately from plucking of tea leaves to transporting the green leaf to the factory and once the green leaf reaches the factory it under goes the treatment of withering, rolling, fermentation, drying, sorting to different grades and finally packing and dispatching (p.160). In the later part of this chapter the author has cited the views of a cross section of the buyers and supporters, who have been in one way or the other linked with Darjeeling tea.

Chapter XVIII: "The Future of Darjeeling Tea" the author writes, Darjeeling tea industry is slowly drifting towards a situation where things would get more and more difficult by the day (p.191). The tea yield per hector has declined resulting in an uncontrollable increase in the cost of production and poor wage structure as quotient. He has made proposals for improving the condition of Tea Industry in

Darjeeling and has thrown some light on what needs to be done in the future to sustain the plantation while underlining the problems that Darjeeling Tea Industry is passing through.

The author pleads to all the stake holders to cast their differences aside and direct positive thoughts and efforts towards keeping the Tea Industry alive, healthy and to uphold the pride of Darjeeling Tea. In a categorical manner, he prescribes the list of expectations and benefits to the entire stakeholder, i.e., management, political parties, Trade Union and government upon its procurement.

Through this book J.P. Gurung has presented the reality of his times. In the words of Krishan Katyal, "this book is as much an autobiography as it is a perceptive commentary into the life and times of the Darjeeling planter and his milieu...I sense that the author is not writing an account of history. He is a part of what created that history." The book truly helps to keep the glory of the tea industry of Darjeeling alive for the future generations. The author very persistently showcases his love and concern not just for a cup of Darjeeling tea, but its sustenance for present and the future.

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