

## Debt to Corona

The calamity of Corona is mainly covered along the lines of number of cases and deaths in various countries. Other factors are ignored perhaps deliberately. Main amongst them is inequality. The article tries to highlight still other factors like cultural orientation and a few international developments with the onset of Corona.

First, inequality. Inequality is of different types. Each type has many sub-types as well. Its victims vary accordingly. Gap between haves and have-nots is the visible economic inequality. Holding a particular race for the spread of Corona or denying them or not giving them the treatment otherwise due is racial inequality. [Inequalities based on national, regional identities are sub-types of racial inequality]. Religious inequality manifests itself in two main types – one intrareligious, two interreligious. These are just three examples. Ugly underside of each society so far under wraps is getting exposed due to advent of Corona. That is its contribution to humanity.

As it is not possible to cover all the facets of the issue in the limited space of an article, only a few samples are touched upon.

### Economic inequality

Hundreds of daily wage labourers trying to leave Delhi on foot to go back to their native places hundreds of kilometres away, crowding Bandra railway station in Mumbai twice because of a rumour that trains are available to North India where the migrant labour want to go back, same scenes in Surat. This is obvious economic inequality. It is an outcome of an insensitive government's Corona control policy who have lost touch with the grassroots and are serving the interests of the middle and upper classes. Daily labourer cannot afford to sit at home. Maintaining a distance of a meter may be possible for middle and upper classes. In a place like Dharavi [*the biggest slum in Mumbai, Asia's largest*] there is one toilet for a few hundred people. Social distancing cannot work there. Such a callous government obtains not only in India, it is also elsewhere like in South Africa. Slums of Cape Town have 12 to 15 occupants per tin shanty. One communal tap serves water to the area. They all use a common toilet. Residents say they can observe social distancing when out on the street, not within their area of living or in house. And going out is prohibited by the government. Such a situation can only be a fertile ground for the spread of Corona. Findings of the AIDS epidemic in S Africa concluded that

AIDS spread because of gender inequality, poverty and violence. Same can happen about Corona.

Labour in S America is experiencing the same plight as of thousands of migrant labourers trying to leave Delhi/Mumbai. Deteriorating and hopeless living conditions in their native Venezuela made many migrate to neighbouring Colombia. Most of them are not on government records meaning they are illegal residents. That makes them ineligible to avail of minimum wages, health services available to Colombian citizens. Corona has endangered their livelihood. Due to lack of public transport, many have started trekking across to Venezuela.

A sub-type of economic inequality is street children. They are neither in government sights nor that of non-governmental, voluntary organisations. For example, in Indian cities such children wipe windows of cars waiting at traffic lights, try to sell flags, flowers, mops. They live on streets. Basically they came to streets to escape domestic environment. It could be violence, addict parents, abuse at home. Governments do not address this systemic problem with a definite policy. In developing countries governments would rather these children disappear. That is the 'policy'. In many countries they have been driven off streets due to Corona. No alternative accommodation is provided. In the words of such a boy in Mombasa, Kenya 'It would be better if police jail us. We will get shelter and food. Rich can afford to stay at home because they have stock of food there. Our entire stock is in our tummy.' Restaurants, eateries in the city used to provide meals to these children. Now they are shut. These children ask the same question Indian migrant labour ask – do we die of Corona or hunger.

Economic inequality will be exacerbated by Corona. As of today, 135 million are chronically malnourished in the world. This number is likely to be doubled. Present conditions of the lowest stratum are - no jobs, no means of livelihood, no cash reserves. Food scarcity due to less agri-products is on the horizon.

#### Ethnic inequality

A number of landlords in the Chinese city of Guangzhou turned out the African tenants overnight, at times summoning police for the ouster. These Africans had not been to any outside country for months nor were in contact with Corona-affected people. Still, they continue to be stigmatised. They do not get a hotel to stay for night and are forced to spend time on streets. Police object

to that and their moving about in groups. They wander the streets alone. A few voluntary organisations try to help them and are harassed by police in turn. Wuhan city in China saw the birth of Corona. A video from there shows Chinese police pushing an African roughly towards a police station for inquiry. This video was widely viewed in Africa. China has big investment in that continent. Also there are a million Chinese living there. Africans reacting violently and/or turning against China is unaffordable to China.

In the USA blacks and Hispanics bear the brunt of Corona much more than whites. Incidence of Corona and deaths due to it among them are much higher among them than among whites. Same applies to native Americans. 5.2 millions of them in the USA have anyway higher heart diseases and diabetes compared to whites. Add to that lack of medical care and poverty. Small dwellings mean more people live together. Social distancing is not possible. This increases the risk of Corona which has started showing.

In Brazil these people live in remote areas, away from health services and they do not have basic amenities either. They have low immunity against the diseases of modern 'civilisation', much less against Corona. A 15 year boy from this area was studying in a nearby city. He returned to his village with Corona and died. This neglected community may have much higher incidence than the general population. On top of it the president is in denial about Corona. *[at the time of writing. Later he and his wife got it.]*

### Religious inequality

A particular sect within a religion defies social distancing. About 50 mullas in Pakistan do not obey it in their mosques during namaz. Even as the top Saudi cleric advised social distancing. 'Don't be a Rambo'. [ Saudi Arabia closed their mosques.] Christian Orthodox Church is powerful in Georgia – an ex-Soviet Union country. It defies the countrywide lockdown and holds service/events in the church. Devotees attend in large numbers too. This is intrareligious inequality. Interreligious inequality is seen in Pakistan. During lockdown only Muslims are served the government rations for the poor. Christians and Hindus are denied it.

## Cultural factors

To cite only one example, in Iraq it is a matter of great personal shame if the neighbourhood gets to know about a person's illness, a disgrace to be avoided at all costs. Therefore, likely cases of Corona request the health authorities not to visit them with their paraphernalia. Now, Iraq-Iran human traffic is quite high mainly for shia pilgrimages. Iran is badly affected by Corona but in Iraq the caseload is surprisingly very low. That is because people hide the ailment until it becomes unbearable.

Another cultural factor is seen in traditional societies. Elderly people are more vulnerable to Corona. Guideline is to keep them in isolation. This is not followed. Such societies regard an elderly person to be a valuable member of the family who imparts knowledge to younger generations.

## Other international developments

- Saudi Arabia imposed a war on Yemen five years back. This a behind the screen war against Iran. This war has claimed more than 100,000 victims, almost all of them innocent citizens and children. With the advent of Corona, Saudi declared a ceasefire. May be this genocide comes to an end now. *[It has not]*
- China claims that about 13 million sq kms of South China sea to be its waters. Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and other countries in the region do not agree. [This issue has been covered extensively in Andolan, March 2014]. To support these countries the USA has been parading its naval might there. Corona affected their crew and the American patrol weakened. China took advantage and reasserted itself by sinking a fishing vessel of Vietnam there. Vietnam claims it was in its waters, China claims otherwise.
- In his typical impulsive and short-sighted style Trump announced withholding of aid to the World Health Organisation[WHO] for the next few months *[ Process of initiating the withdrawal has started since then]* According to him WHO did not handle the Corona crisis properly. Actually Trump's accusations against the WHO apply to himself. This is projection. Not to realise the gravity of the virus to start with, not to make people aware of the gravity and not to take preventive measures early on. This has claimed more than 40,000 American lives so far.*[more than 150,000 since writing the article.]*

- Projecting the blame onto others is one part of his style. Secondly, this regime has always resented being part of the global community. In 2017 the USA walked out of global accord on climate protection [Paris Agreement] with same spite. Whatever its shortfalls, today WHO is the only organisation addressing Corona at the global level. For the biggest contributor to opt out is both immoral and detrimental to global well-being.
- China increased the figure of Wuhan deaths from 2,500 to 4,000. The new figure is also dubious. Then there is a claim that the virus was manufactured in a Wuhan lab, an employee contracted it and spread it out. USA is reportedly looking into this claim.
- In S Korea 163 patients 'cured' of Corona were found to be positive again. The second act seems to have started before the end of the first one.
- If the virus spreads in Africa unprecedented human misery will ensue. Forget basic health services, water and soap are not available to majority. Of the 55 countries in Africa, 10 have no ventilator. For many millions 41 countries have 2000 ventilators. USA has 170,000.

#### Observations

- That the lowest stratum of the society cannot live with minimum human dignity is a social obscenity. Denying them basic needs is a heinous crime governments have been committing with impunity for decades. The pandemic has brought this inequality in every society blatantly to the fore.
- Corona does not distinguish between believers and non-believers, poor and rich. It has exposed the fallacy of ideologies dividing societies along these axes. They may be religion, its esoteric sects, its self-centred delusional practices, etc. They may be right-left and umpteen in-between socio-political ideologies, etc. They have been rendered irrelevant.
- Corona does not respect national boundaries

Therefore, we see leadership of countries based on any of the above ideologies equally confused about dealing with Corona. [Iran – religious leadership, Europe – rightist/centrist leadership, USA – rightist leadership, China – so-called leftist leadership and everyone self-declared 'nationalist']. Human-constructed ideologies including science [esp medical 'science']

seem to be ambulance chasers, trying to extinguish the fire after it is out of control, totally clueless about how to. A likely explanation may be that in the context of Corona these are not omniscient ideologies at all [as they have been claiming all along]. They are frauds. The revelation is coming about the most painful way but we should be grateful to Corona for it. Needless to say, we will continue with our delusions.