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Tale of Two Indias

Corona reality check: Treat the poor as equal citizens, not a faceless horde

Sagarika Ghose



The journeys are startling, unprecedented. Mahesh Jena, 20, cycled 1,700 km from Maharashtra to his home in Odisha. Ranveer Singh walked 200 km from Delhi only to collapse and perish on the highway. 24-year-old Kallibai Kevat, heavily pregnant, walked 500 km from Mathura in UP to Panna in MP, and gave birth when she arrived home, famished and exhausted. 12-year-old Jamlo Makdam, her parents' only child, walked over 100 km from Telangana towards Chhattisgarh, but died from exhaustion before reaching home.

Thousands are walking on India's scorching highways, hungry, jobless and dog tired. Their children toil behind them. India's brutal social and economic inequalities are suddenly being glaringly revealed, every day in news headlines.

For too long Mahesh, Ranveer, Kalli and Jamlo had been erased from view, wiped out by dreams of "aspirational" India and the \$5 trillion economy, barely seen in the media. They are lumped under the category "migrant workers" but many are expert masons, skilled artisans, carpenters, tailors, drivers, delivery men, who keep the engines of the city moving even though they're treated as unwelcome, unnoticed guests, a faceless horde, existing on sufferance.

When India's economy was reformed in 1991, big transformations swept through finance and trade, but reforms barely touched the one sector crying out for liberalisation: agriculture. The benefits of reforms were not felt in rural areas with a plethora of restrictions caging the farmer. As the liberal farm leader Sharad Joshi once asked, when finance and industry are deemed worthy of liberalisation, why isn't agriculture, India's largest private sector?

Economic liberalisation has enabled millions escape poverty. According to a UN index during 2006-16, India lifted 271 million out of poverty. For urbanites liberalisation brought new cars, apartments, holidays, gadgets and cash. Good times began. City dwellers kicked up their heels and in Shamma Kapoor style, shouted: yahoo. Media filled up with reports of rich lists, new words like "neo middle class", global success stories, IT czars and exciting startups. Yet in 2011 World Bank estimated that these successes were patchy and 276 million people in India continued to live below the poverty line.

But liberalised India shrugged off this troublesome statistic, farmer suicides relegated to the margins, policy makers ignoring Joshi's cry for farmers, "We don't want alms, we want price for our sweat and toil." With the benefits of liberalisation not reaching farms, millions of rural migrants poured into cities to partake their share of the golden highways. They were often targeted as hated "outsiders" by political outfits like Shiv Sena and MNS, the migrant worker an ever present irritant in so-called shining India.

Bollywood, once concerned with gritty realities of landlessness in Do Bigha Zamin or labour unrest like in Namak Haraam, now romped into a glitzy new era in which the poor were out and the rich were in. The glittering 1994 fantasy Hum Aapke Hain Koun became the template of post-liberalisation depictions of fulsome middle class prosperity.

It's taken a pandemic to bring the poor back into the spotlight and back into the news. Politicians, shrewdly attuned to voter concerns have known what many chose to forget. Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh unveiled a slew of pro-poor schemes like MGNREGA and Prime Minister Narendra Modi quickly moved to junk any suit boot image and pushed for Jan Dhan Yojana, Ujjwala gas, et al. Yet electoral sops are one thing, serious policy initiatives to address the needs of the urban poor are another. AAP made a small beginning with mohalla clinics and free water, but even these have not stopped thousands from upping and leaving Delhi.

Covid-19 is an opportunity for a reset. The urban and rural poor can't be kept happy with populist handouts on the one hand and lathis of state authoritarianism on the other. Sensible, well-thought out measures are needed to liberate agriculture from suffocating restrictions, freeing small enterprises from police danda and making ease of doing business available to the smallest rural entrepreneur. The horrible inequalities created in times of hardship must be mitigated by bumper doses of compassion.

This means not differentiating brazenly between those who matter and those who don't. Buses have been provided for pilgrims from Varanasi to Telangana and for Gujarat tourists from Uttarakhand back to Gujarat. Students from Kota are being rushed home by the UP administration. Yet after giving only four hours notice for a month-long paralysis of 1.3 billion people, not a single special train service was provided for migrant workers and their children to return home. Public transport – the lifeline of the poor – was shut off without warning. Economist Jean Dreze points out that 77 million tonnes of food lies in India's granaries. These supplies have still not been made available.

We need to ask: Who belongs to India's cities? Is it only those who frequent cafes and malls? Or do cities also belong to those who serve at cafes and sweep and paint the malls? Workers must be helped to put down roots in the city through low cost housing and access to facilities and leisure spots the middle class enjoys. Mahesh, Ranveer, Kalli and Jamlo are equal citizens of India and deserve every benefit of the free economy. The great exodus of 2020 holds out an urgent lesson: The poor are not just a faceless swarm or a vote bank. They have names, they are citizens, by law equal to any urban VIP. They need to be seen and their voices need to be heard.

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Going back to a new school

Post-pandemic, a shift in mindset will be needed — to teach and learn

Ameeta Mulla Wattal , [The writer is principal, Springdales School, Pusa Road, New Delhi]



“No more pencils no more books/ No more teacher’s dirty looks/ Out for summer/ Out till fall/ We might not come back at all/ School’s out forever.../ School’s out with fever”.

It seems these lyrics of Alice Cooper have come back to haunt us.

Since the middle of March, millions of students have been out of school, because of the COVID-19 lockdown. This has also affected more than one lakh

students, who could not complete their Class 12 board examinations.

Today, even after a month of announcements and extensions, it is difficult to predict when schools will restart. Schooling is supposed to look after the emotional, social and behavioural health of children, which is diametrically opposite to social distancing.

Presently, teachers are trying to engage with online teaching and learning. The technology may vary across schools and states but as educators, we have to look at the implications of these new learning processes for our learners.

From live TV broadcasting of academic subjects, video interactions, online theatre, to working with special needs learners, it is all about embracing learning “anywhere anytime”. It is apparent that technological evaluation systems, touchscreen paper corrections, digital books and smart boards have become the new reality.

Going forward, in the new post-pandemic environment, what will be required is a huge shift in mindset — both social and emotional. A new approach is needed to teach in this altered online paradigm.

Unfortunately, as far as the education of the rural poor students is concerned, they inhabit the bottom of a digital abyss. Governments will have to think very seriously about allocating more money in the budget for technical education in schools.

However, wherever students have been involved with online learning, their responses have been very good — this has strengthened the resolve of teachers across the country, and has inspired them to work harder.

But the role of the teacher has not been fully understood during this crisis. Teachers are as important as health workers because they are looking after the mental, emotional and social health of children at home. Although it is too early to judge how the learning trajectory will be affected by online teaching, it is very clear that future transformations will ensure that classroom transactions are complemented with novel technological tools. The new challenge is, how to keep thousands of children out of school if their parents are allowed to return to their work spaces — even if in a staggered manner. And, whenever this happens, who assumes responsibility for a child's safety and learning at home?

Within this new school/learning paradigm, it will have to be seen how best to engage the children not only in education but in socialising with their peers, creating safe zones to play, and, how to also provide meals and support families which are working. In India, home-learning on a large scale will be a challenge, essentially because of non-availability of equipment and network-connectivity issues, and the fact that parents may not be in a position to facilitate home-learning.

We need to ensure that teachers come back to work so that hands-on training can happen — since many of them may not be technologically adept. For many teachers, their entire world has changed: From traditional teaching tools to juggling with gadgets and software, they are relying only on their personal understanding.

If school opens in July or even later, 3,000 children cannot simply come back. A post-pandemic school plan is essential and has to be prepared. With a staggered opening, the government and school leaders will have to think of novel methods by which children can be assimilated back into the school setting. And this has to be looked at bearing in mind the normal school calendar. Perhaps the new education policy needs to be revisited quickly and recalibrated.

Some practical things that can be done are: Cleaning and sanitising the classrooms and areas where children converge regularly; increasing the medical staff and counsellors in schools; planning a new school calendar where any event with large gatherings of students/parents is avoided, that is, sports days, annual days and parent teacher meetings. There can be cancellation of excursions and inter-school events within and outside the city; reworking of school timings and putting in place of student attendance on a rota basis. School walls could have colourful, pictorial depictions and slogans that sensitise students on basic cleanliness and hygiene such as washing hands, and social distancing — although too many displays of pandemic visuals should be avoided as it creates anxiety in the minds of children. We need to ensure the building of a strong parent-school partnership, if social distancing has to be understood and implemented; conduct periodic workshops by psychologists, medical practitioners and counsellors to help sensitise the students, enabling them to understand the situation.

When students return to school, they will be the least prepared for any form of traditional testing — all such testing measures should be put on hold at all levels and there should be more emphasis on instruction and emotional development. Particularly, the students in pre-primary and primary — in the age group of three to 10 — will find it very difficult to get into a routine because they would have been out of school for over six months. At the primary level, when children return, they should be allowed to have their own learning options — creating personalised portfolios and project-based learning is important.

This will enable the children to find a sense of academic freedom, which they would have missed in the restricted confines of their homes. As far as senior students are concerned, we have already lost 2020 and this situation may stretch to 2021, as far as regular school learning is concerned. Hence, it is imperative that when dealing with senior students, we should help them understand the importance of resilience and mental strength in order to face climatic change, disease, natural and man-made disasters and even rapid technological changes.

The pandemic has truly reiterated the much clichéd skills of the 21st century: Decision making, problem solving, ability to innovate and, most importantly, adaptability.

These are extraordinary times, and we need extraordinary measures. The states and boards will have to, perhaps, look beyond traditional board examinations not only for the current year, but also for 2021. There is no doubt that returning to school after this pandemic will truly be a disruptive learning exercise at all levels.

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What we can do for the city

From using technology to track COVID-19 cases to setting up community kitchens, battle against pandemic has kindled innovation, ways to connect

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COVID-19, a new disease of the coronavirus family, has engulfed almost the entire world. Developed countries such as the US, Spain, Italy, France and Germany seem to have suffered the most. India has managed to keep the number of those infected relatively low, despite its high population density. The government has had to make some hard choices. Saving lives and reducing human casualties was the government's first priority when it imposed the 21-day lockdown — this was extended by 18 days. An unfortunate fallout of this directive was the sudden loss of income for daily wagers, informal sector workers and those employed in the gig economy. The lockdown made things difficult for migrant workers and many of them were forced to start a long walk back home.

During unprecedented crises, such as the one we face today, administrations across the world take time to organise themselves and initiate relief operations. In India, the first task of the administration was to manage the healthcare system. It took time to stabilise the labour force by make provision for food and shelter. At the same time, the battle against the pandemic has kindled our desire to innovate, learn and find ways to connect and support one another during times of social distancing. We have put technology to great use to achieve this, by rapidly setting up data-based monitoring platforms to manage and contain the spread of the virus, to help each other meet immediate needs and cater to our emotional wellbeing, and support the underprivileged financially. Communities, civil society and corporates have come forward to partner the government in rendering public services. Some of these initiatives have the potential for wider deployment.

Among these initiatives is the Surat Municipal Corporation's COVID-19 Tracker App, which helps monitor people under home-quarantine and tracks the health status of those with a recent history of foreign travel. From a hands-on control room, the city maintains a database and tracks more than 8,500 individuals using this application. In Bengaluru, the Brihan Bengaluru Mahanagar Pallike developed a Coronavirus War Room within 24 hours. This 24×7 war room maps every COVID-19 positive case using GIS, tracks healthcare workers using GPS, and draws up containment plans using heat mapping technologies. The city has forged partnerships with academia and private sector technology companies. A COVID-19 data dashboard was launched on April 7. Nagpur's city administration has collaborated with the private sector outfit, HLL Lifecare, to launch a coronavirus app for the benefit of symptomatic citizens. If this app detects COVID-like symptoms in a citizen, it alerts a team of doctors immediately. Similarly, the E-Doctor Seva, a public-private partnership initiative in Agra, offers tele-video consultation facility. People can secure online appointments and have a tele/video call with a doctor. Doctors provide online prescriptions, and in emergency cases, deliver medications to the patients by cabs.

Many cities have also repurposed existing innovations rapidly at little or no cost to offer support during this crisis. For example, in December 2019, the Greater Chennai Corporation was developing a mobile app to crowd-source information on operational flaws in existing civic infrastructure — such as potholes and faulty pipelines. During the lockdown, this app was customised for COVID monitoring. Citizens of Chennai used this app to voluntarily report their symptoms to help the administration map likely cases and take appropriate protective measures.

Several other innovative approaches have been adopted to sanitise and disinfect public places during the lockdown. For example, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) has manufactured “Bhelmister”, a disinfectant sprayer, in four days. This equipment was deployed in the Melvisharam Municipality, Tamil Nadu, to sanitise streets and areas with a high number of suspected and quarantine cases. The machine uses water mixed with a sanitiser, atomised through a spray nozzle and converted to fine droplets. It can pump out 2,000 litres of disinfectant in two hours and is placed on a vehicle to access narrow lanes.

Rajkot has leveraged corporate social responsibility to avail support from a company, that manufactures agricultural machines, to procure 18 high clearance boom sprayers — used for spraying pesticides on crops. These machines are used to disinfect the city's roads.

Across cities, communities have collaborated to provide essentials to the poor and set up community kitchens. Residents of Raipur set up a food control room within 24 hours of the lockdown. Every day, approximately 15,000 packets of cooked and uncooked foods are distributed to the needy with the help of nearly 104 non-profit organisations, self-help groups and over 10,000 volunteers. In UP, the Lucknow Municipal Corporation has established community kitchens at multiple locations, which feed more than 4,000 people daily. Similar kitchens have come up in Aligarh and Saharanpur as well. In Kerala, 1,255 community kitchens across 14 districts distribute more than 2.5 lakh food packets daily. In Chandigarh, the administration, in collaboration with market committees and the Chandigarh Transport Undertaking, has deployed over 70 buses to transport essential supplies from the central market for distribution to resident welfare associations through 144 licensed vendors.

These initiatives have shown that India's “social capital” — its citizens, civil society, corporates and academia — are its strength during a crisis. Hence, when the Prime Minister called upon us to applaud the frontline workers who are risking their lives to keep us safe last month, the entire country expressed solidarity. This is a time when responsible residents are not asking what their city can do for them but asking what they can do for their city.



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The village is still relevant

As the pandemic crisis shows, villages have a right to flourish as habitations with their own distinctive future

Krishna Kumar , [Krishna Kumar is a former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)]

The upheaval caused by the novel coronavirus should inspire a review of past choices and policies. Some of these policies had gained so much acceptance that one felt there was no point left in questioning them. Public health and education are two areas in which India took a decisive turn in the 1990s. When several States decided to stop giving permanent appointment letters to doctors and teachers in the mid-1990s, they were guided by an ideological shift at the national level towards allowing health and education to be opened up for private enterprise. This was viewed as a major policy reform, a necessary part of the bigger package of economic reforms. They were presented as a package, offering little choice for specific areas.

Taking a back seat

The new buzz was public-private partnership. It covered everything from roads to schools. The form it took made it amply clear that the state would take a back seat after issuing a set of rules for private operators while the state's own infrastructure will shrink. Soon enough, cost-effective measures became the priority in both health and education. Chronic shortage of functionaries became the norm while young persons learned to wait for years for vacancies to be announced. Working on short-term contracts, with little security or dignity, became common.

As we begin to imagine the post-coronavirus scenario, a key question to contemplate is whether we should revisit the policies put in place during the 1990s. Some will doubtless argue that the clock cannot be put back, and that we should not waver from the path we had chosen, no matter what hardships people have to endure. Certain policies were specific to domains such as health and education. Others were more like frameworks within which policies for specific areas emerged and evolved. One such framework had to do with villages.

For a long time, a view had been gathering support that villages were no more viable as sites of public investment. A generalised logic had surfaced to justify and thereby encourage emigration from rural areas to cities. According to this logic, providing basic amenities such as running water, electricity and jobs to rural people becomes easier if they move to a city. This kind of thinking had considerable academic support. Modernisation was a dominant paradigm of social theory that saw nothing wrong in the growth of vast slums in mega-cities and depletion of working-age people in villages. Some social

scientists did not mind declaring that the village as we had known it in Indian history was on its way to extinction. They argued that agriculture, the main resource of livelihood in the countryside, was no longer profitable enough to attract the young. And handicrafts too were destined to die, they said, as craftsmen and women cannot survive without state support. Only pockets of support survived the powerful wave of market-oriented economic reforms.

All such arguments and the data they were based on provided a comfortable rationale for policies that encouraged emigration of a vast section of the rural population to cities. It was something 'natural' that happens in the course of economic development in countries like ours. Students were taught that shrinking of rural livelihoods was a universal phenomenon and it was, therefore, inevitable in India.

Acceptance of historical destiny implied that we could simply sit back and let history take its familiar course. The only thing the welfare state might do was to mitigate the misery of the masses. As they faced the decimation of the rural people's economy, safety nets could be thrown at them to provide subsistence-level provision of food, literacy and disease control. Special measures were designed to select the 'best' among rural children and make them competitive enough to survive in the urban world that was treated as mainstream.

Imbalance and invisibility

This general framework justified discriminatory funding in every sphere, including health and education. No serious public investment could be made in villages. Even as medical education and teacher training became increasingly privatised, the availability of qualified doctors and teachers willing to work in villages dwindled. Ideologically-inspired pursuit of economic reforms swept State after State, leaving little room for dissent or longer term thinking. A veneer of welfarism was maintained. It allowed the expansion of essential facilities of a rudimentary kind in villages. They served as sites for special schemes for the poor and provided minimalist provisions. The goal was to keep the poor alive and occupied. Privately-run facilities burgeoned, creating an ethos that boosted commercial goals in health care and schooling. Stuck between state minimalism and commercial entrepreneurship, villages lost what capacity they had for regenerating their economy or intellectual resources.

No words can compete with recent pictures that cast a delayed doubt on this policy scenario. These are pictures of urban workers marching with their families to their native villages hundreds of miles away. There is more than one way of interpreting these pictures. On one hand they encapsulate desperation and apprehension. On the other, these same pictures reveal a story that generations of policy makers and scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge. The photographs captured by the media show men, women and children walking on highways designed to provide high-speed connectivity to cities. In the absence of trains and bus, these families decided to embark on foot. With no prospect of work and income, they felt vulnerable in their shanty towns. They wanted to go home. In the city where they had lived for years, they were part of the informal economy which offers no protection against exigencies. The new urban architecture denies them visibility too. That is perhaps why no one thought about them till they emerged on the wide highways.

Obsolete debates

The novel coronavirus has demonstrated how unsustainable this socio-economic arrangement was, apart from being ethically indefensible. It was characterised by sharp and growing regional disparities. No matter how hard we will try to rebuild the world as it was before the virus struck it, its unsustainability

will not go away. It is rooted in the structural imbalance between the urban and the rural on one hand and the predominance of a skewed vision of economic growth on the other. In this vision, the village has no future other than becoming a pale copy of the urban and eventually dissolving into it.

Once upon a time, there were debates over the nature of India's rural society — on whether it was intrinsically good or bad. These debates are no longer relevant. The village is, however, still relevant, at least for the vast number of urban workers. Similarly, while the problem of defining a village in an academic sense has ceased to matter, its existential reality has asserted itself, and we need to recognise this assertion. If we do, we might agree to notice a problem in policies that do not acknowledge the right of villages to flourish as human habitations with their own distinctive future. They deserve to have new sites and forms of livelihood. They also deserve systems of health and education that are not designed as feeders to distant centres. Initiatives in this direction will make both cities and villages more sustainable and capable of coping with the kind of crisis we are currently facing.

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Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs

Enacting a law barring appointments of retired judges by the government will restore confidence in the judiciary

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The Constitution has been conceived to provide a pride of place to the judiciary. Constitutional appointees to the Supreme Court have been guaranteed several rights in order to secure their independence. Chapter 4 of Part V of the Constitution deals with the Supreme Court, and Chapter 5 of Part VI deals with the High Courts. The salaries of judges and their age of retirement are all guaranteed in order to secure their independence. They cannot be easily removed except by way of impeachment under Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b). They have the power to review legislation and strike it down. They can also question the acts of the executive. All this makes it clear that the framers of the Constitution envisaged an unambitious judiciary for which the only guiding values were the provisions of the Constitution.

The Gogoi example

It was thought that on retirement from high constitutional office, a judge would lead a retired life. Nobody ever expected them to accept plum posts. But the clear demarcation between the judiciary and executive got blurred as many judges over the years began to accept posts offered by the government. A few years ago, a former Chief Justice of India (CJI) was made a Governor by the ruling BJP government. Now, we have the case of a former CJI, Ranjan Gogoi, being nominated by the President to the Rajya Sabha and taking oath as Member of Parliament. During his tenure as CJI, Justice Gogoi presided over important cases such as Ayodhya and Rafale where all the decisions went in favour of the government. This gave rise to the impression that his nomination was a reward for these 'favours'. Thus his appointment — and that too within a few months of his retirement — not only raised eyebrows but came in for severe condemnation from varied quarters.

People are fast losing confidence in the so-called independent judiciary. In 2013, former Union Minister Arun Jaitley, who was also a senior Advocate, ironically said on the floor of Rajya Sabha: "I think, we are going a bit too far now, in every legislation, in creating post-retirement avenues for Judges. Almost everyone, barring a few notable, honourable men, who are an exception, wants a job after retirement. If we (Parliament) don't create it, they themselves create it. The desire of a post-retirement job influences pre-retirement judgments. It is a threat to the independence of the Judiciary and once it influences pre-retirement judgments, it adversely impacts on the functioning of our Judiciary." It is in this context that the appointment of Mr. Gogoi has to be perceived.

An interview that Justice Gogoi gave after assuming office as member of the Rajya Sabha made the situation worse. When asked whether his nomination was a quid-pro-quo for his having delivered judgments in favour of the Central government, his answer, that he was not the only judge but there were other judges too, was damaging. His view that membership of the Rajya Sabha was not a job but a service, and that once the President nominated him the call of duty required him to accept it, only created the impression that the judiciary is pliant. A bare reading of Article 80(3) of the Constitution only envisages the President to nominate "persons having special knowledge... in literature, science, art and social service" as members to the Rajya Sabha. It is difficult to imagine that the Constitution-makers had in mind a retired CJI when framing this provision.

Undoing the damage

Therefore, appointments of persons who have held constitutional office will undermine the very constitutional values of impartiality in the dispensation of justice. It will also go against the clear demarcation of separation of powers. It is true that there are no rules which stood in Justice Gogoi's way of being appointed to the Rajya Sabha. But such matters cannot be left to the individual vagaries of judges. If post-retirement appointments are going to undermine confidence in the judiciary and in constitutional democracy, it is time to have a law in place either by way of a constitutional amendment or a parliamentary enactment barring such appointments. This is the only way to secure the confidence of the people and prevent post-retirement appointments. Judges can be compensated by being given their last drawn salary as pension. Also, the age of retirement for judges can be increased by a year or two. This will undo the damage caused by post-retirement jobs. It is important to remember that judges are constitutional servants, not government servants.



दैनिक भास्कर

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देश का खाद्यान्न भंडार भविष्य में देगा बड़ी राहत

संपादकीय

ऐसा मानव इतिहास में पहले कभी नहीं हुआ कि पूरी दुनिया अप्रत्याशित और अपूर्व अवसाद में हो। समर्थ और बलहीन दोनों मानो एक ही नाव में हों जो डूब-उतरा रही हो। हर सुबह लगता है कि सब कुछ खत्म हो सकता है। विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन और उसके सॉलिडैरिटी (कई प्रमुख देशों के वैज्ञानिकों का इस मुद्दे पर शोध का समेकित प्रयास) से उम्मीद तो थी कि अचानक इलाज या वैक्सीन खोजने की घोषणा करेगा, लेकिन दो दिन पहले संगठन ने कहा कि संकट अभी और विकराल रूप लेगा। उधर, हांगकांग या चीन जैसे जिन देशों ने यह मानकर कि उनके यहां रोग का ग्राफ समतल हो गया है या नीचे आने लगा, उद्योग-व्यापार शुरू किया, वहां कोरोना का दूसरा हमला हो गया। विश्व मुद्राकोष यह कहकर डरा रहा है कि अर्थव्यवस्था पर कोरोना का जहर अगले कई सालों तक दुनिया में बेरोजगारी असाधारण रूप से बढ़ाएगा। कोरोना के डर और इन रिपोर्टों से पैदा हुए इस विश्वव्यापी व्यक्तिगत, पारिवारिक और सामूहिक अवसाद को लेकर समाजशास्त्री मानते हैं कि इससे मानव व्यवहार, सोच और जीवन के प्रति नजरिया बदलेगा। भारत में उद्योगों के खोले जाने की शर्त को देखकर औद्योगिक संगठनों ने कारखाने चलाने में असमर्थता दिखाई है। उनका कहना है कि केंद्र की गाइडलाइंस में किसी मजदूर में कोरोना पाए जाने पर मालिक पर आपराधिक मुकदमा करना और मजदूरों को फैक्ट्री के पास ही आवास और खाने की व्यवस्था का जिम्मा मालिकों पर डालना भी उद्यमियों का उत्साह कम करेगा। उधर, लोग केवल जीवन के लिए जरूरी सामान ही खरीद रहे हैं, जबकि सामान्य अवस्था में बाहर खाना, घूमने जाना, मनोरंजन पर खर्च, ब्रांडेड माल का उपभोग आदि अर्थव्यवस्था को गति देता है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र की खाद्य संस्था ने कहा कि आने वाले समय में खाद्यान्न का भयंकर संकट होगा और दुनिया की करीब 100 करोड़ आबादी भुखमरी का शिकार हो सकती है। भारत के पास अवसाद से बाहर आने और हौसला बढ़ाने के तीन कारण हैं। पहला, भारत में अमेरिका के मुकाबले रोग के टेस्ट/पुष्टि का अनुपात 183 गुना कम है, यानी कोरोना की घातक क्षमता भारत में कम है। दूसरा, लॉकडाउन का सकारात्मक असर अब मरीजों की संख्या में दिखने लगा है और तीसरा, देश में सालभर का अनाज है और नई बुवाई का रकबा भी बढ़ा है, जो आने वाले समय में बड़ी राहत देगा। अंधेरी सुरंग के उस पार एक दिया टिमटिमा रहा है।

नई दुनिया

Date:23-04-20

कानून का शासन

संपादकीय

कोरोना आपदा के रूप में मानव सेहत के लिए सबसे बड़े संकट से जूझते डॉक्टरों और स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों पर हमले के साथ ही उनसे बुरे बर्ताव की जैसी घोर लज्जास्पद घटनाएं सामने आ रही हैं उन्हें देखते हुए कानूनी प्रावधानों को सख्त करने के अलावा और कोई उपाय नहीं रह गया था। केंद्र सरकार ने महामारी अधिनियम में संशोधन करने के लिए अध्यादेश लाने का फैसला करके एक सही कदम उठाया। ऐसे किसी कदम की आवश्यकता इसलिए बढ़ गई थी, क्योंकि एक तो इन घटनाओं के चलते दुनिया भर में देश की बदनामी हो रही थी और दूसरे, अपने पर हमले से हैरान-परेशान डॉक्टर इंडियन मेडिकल एसोसिएशन के बैनर तले विरोध दर्ज कराने की तैयारी कर रहे थे। सरकार के कदम को देखते हुए उन्होंने अपने विरोध को तो स्थगित कर दिया, लेकिन केवल इतने से संतुष्ट नहीं हुआ जा सकता कि संशोधित महामारी अधिनियम में चिकित्सकों और स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों पर हमले के दोषियों के खिलाफ सजा के साथ जुर्माने का भी प्रावधान किया गया है।

दुष्ट तत्वों को सही सबक तब मिलेगा जब उनके दुराचरण के लिए उन्हें कठोर दंड का भागीदार बनाया जाएगा। एक ऐसा माहौल बनाने की जरूरत है जिससे डॉक्टरों, स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों और साथ ही सफाईकर्मियों के खिलाफ हिंसा और अभद्रता कर रहे तत्व भय खाएं। ऐसा माहौल तभी बनेगा जब राज्य सरकारें ऐसे तत्वों के खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई को लेकर अतिरिक्त सतर्क रहेंगी। उन्हें अपनी कार्रवाई से यह संदेश देना ही होगा कि डॉक्टरों, स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों, सफाईकर्मियों के साथ पुलिस पर हमले को किसी भी कीमत पर सहन नहीं किया जाएगा।

कोरोना के खिलाफ जंग में असहयोग और अभद्रता करने पर आमादा तत्वों का दुस्साहस कितना बढ़ा हुआ है, यह इससे पता चलता है कि वे पुलिस पर भी हमला करने से बाज नहीं आ रहे हैं। वे पुलिस पर तब हमला कर रहे हैं जब वह उनकी मदद के लिए उन तक पहुंच रही है। इंदौर, मुरादाबाद के साथ कुछ अन्य शहरों में डॉक्टरों के साथ पुलिस पर हमले की घटनाओं को किसी गलतफहमी का परिणाम मानना एक भूल ही होगी। ये घटनाएं तो किसी सुनियोजित दुष्प्रचार का हिस्सा जान पड़ती हैं। इस दुष्प्रचार को रोकने की जितनी जिम्मेदारी शासन-प्रशासन की है उतनी ही समाज की भी।

निःसंदेह जागरूकता की कमी असामान्य आचरण का कारण बन सकती है, लेकिन इसका यह मतलब नहीं कि डॉक्टरों और पुलिस पर हमला किया जाए। पुलिस पर हमला तो कानून के शासन पर आघात है। पुलिस को निशाना बनाने का मतलब है कानून के शासन को छिन्न-भिन्न करना। महामारी अधिनियम में संशोधन सर्वथा उचित है, लेकिन उन कारणों का निवारण भी जरूरी है जिनके चलते कानून के शासन की हेठी होती है।

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

Date: 23-04-20

जियो-फेसबुक सौदा

संपादकीय

सोशल मीडिया की दिग्गज कंपनी फेसबुक ने जियो प्लेटफॉर्म में निवेश की घोषणा की है। यह निवेश, डिजिटल भुगतान को सोशल मीडिया संचार के साथ जोड़कर देश के खुदरा क्षेत्र परिदृश्य को पूरी तरह बदलने की ताकत रखता है। ऐसा दोनों समूहों के तालमेल से संभव होगा जिनका अपने-अपने क्षेत्र में दबदबा है। जियो प्लेटफॉर्म मुकेश अंबानी के नेतृत्व वाली रिलायंस इंडस्ट्रीज समूह की सभी डिजिटल परिसंपत्तियों की होल्डिंग कंपनी है। इसमें दूरसंचार सेवा प्रदाता, जियो इन्फोकॉम शामिल हैं। फेसबुक के पास अपने विशालकाय सोशल नेटवर्क के अलावा व्हाट्सएप और इंस्टाग्राम का स्वामित्व है। जियो के करीब 38.8 करोड़ उपभोक्ता हैं। यह हिस्सेदारी देश के 63.5 करोड़ मोबाइल ब्रॉडबैंड उपभोक्ताओं के बाजार में 50 फीसदी से अधिक है। भारत में फेसबुक के 33 करोड़ सक्रिय उपयोगकर्ता और व्हाट्सएप के 40 करोड़ से अधिक उपयोगकर्ता हैं। व्हाट्सएप ने हाल ही में व्हाट्सएप पे के रूप में डिजिटल भुगतान प्लेटफॉर्म की शुरुआत की है। रिलायंस समूह की खुदरा क्षेत्र और डिजिटल मनोरंजन क्षेत्र में मजबूत उपस्थिति है। इसमें जियो सावन और जियो टीवी शामिल हैं।

फेसबुक जियो प्लेटफॉर्म में 9.9 फीसदी हिस्सेदारी के लिए 43,574 करोड़ रुपये दे रही है। इससे आरआईएल की अनुषंगी कंपनी के मूल्यांकन में करीब 61 अरब डॉलर या 4.63 लाख करोड़ रुपये का इजाफा होगा। यह मूल्यांकन बहुत ज्यादा प्रतीत हो रहा है क्योंकि जियो को अभी यह दिखाना है कि वह अपने व्यापक उपभोक्ता आधार से कैसे कमाएगी, लेकिन फिर भी इस सौदे के लिए पर्याप्त कारण मौजूद हैं। सबसे अहम बात यह है कि जियो टेलीकॉम सेवा, फेसबुक और व्हाट्सएप की मदद से विषय सामग्री, भुगतान और वाणिज्य तीनों क्षेत्रों में एकीकृत ढंग से काम कर सकती है। वह उपभोक्ताओं को सोशल मीडिया और वॉइस और डेटा संचार के अलावा उपरोक्त सुविधाओं का लाभ भी एक साथ दे सकती है।

जियो ई-कॉमर्स, सोशल मीडिया, इंस्टैंट मेसेजिंग और डिजिटल भुगतान के एक मात्र ठिकाने के रूप में उभर सकती है। चीन का ऐप वीचैट इसका मॉडल हो सकता है। टेनसेंट कंपनी का यह ऐप एक अरब से अधिक लोगों को सेवा देता है। लोग विभिन्न सेवाओं के लिए इस एक ऐप का इस्तेमाल करते हैं। अंबानी ने जब कहा कि व्हाट्सएप के साथ जियोमार्ट आपके पास पड़ोस की तीन करोड़ किराना दुकानों को ग्राहकों के साथ डिजिटल लेनदेन की सुविधा देगा, तब वह भविष्य की तस्वीर बयां कर रहे थे। उनके मुताबिक यह सौदा जियो को स्थानीय कारोबारियों से अबाध ढंग से जोड़ेगा और उन्हें ऑनलाइन लेनदेन की सुविधा देगा। इससे देश का खुदरा और ई-कॉमर्स क्षेत्र पूरी तरह बदल सकता है। फेसबुक के संस्थापक मार्क जुकरबर्ग का वक्तव्य भी इस दिशा में इंगित करता है। उन्होंने कहा कि भारत में 6 करोड़ छोटे कारोबार हैं। लेकिन उन्होंने यह नहीं कहा कि फेसबुक को अमेरिका और कनाडा से बाहर (उसका आधा राजस्व वहीं से आता है) नए बाजारों में विस्तार करना है।

नीति निर्माताओं को इस पर करीबी नजर रखनी होगी। चीन में वीचैट के तर्ज पर भारत में यह दबदबे वाली जोड़ी प्रतिस्पर्धा को खत्म कर एकाधिकार जमा सकती है। उपभोक्ताओं और खुदरा कारोबारियों के पास डिजिटल लेनदेन और सोशल मीडिया के प्रयोग के लिए चयन का विकल्प रहना चाहिए। एक सवाल उस डेटा को लेकर भी है जो इस दौरान उपभोक्ताओं से जुटाया जाएगा। निजी डेटा संरक्षण अधिनियम की अनुपस्थिति में भी उसका दुरुपयोग नहीं होना चाहिए। नीति निर्माताओं को सुनिश्चित करना चाहिए कि नेट निरपेक्षता के सिद्धांतों का उल्लंघन न हो क्योंकि चुनिंदा ऐप्स को बेहतर गति प्रदान करना अब आसान होगा। यह सौदा देश की डिजिटल अर्थव्यवस्था में बड़ा बदलाव ला सकता है। यह जहां फेसबुक को नए बाजार उपलब्ध कराएगा, वहीं जियो का कर्ज कम करने में भी मदद करेगा।

 **जनसत्ता**

Date: 23-04-20

प्रदूषण से निपटने की चुनौती

रवि शंकर

कोरोना विषाणु संक्रमण को रोकने के लिए दुनिया भर में उठाए गए पूर्णबंदी जैसे कदम से आबोहवा बदलने लगी है। दुनिया के कई हिस्सों से वायु प्रदूषण, जल प्रदूषण और ध्वनि प्रदूषण कम हुआ है। बंदी का फायदा उठाते हुए प्रकृति अपनी मरम्मत करती नजर आ रही है। केंद्रीय प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड (सीपीसीबी) के आंकड़ों के अनुसार, देश के नब्बे से

अधिक शहरों में पिछले कुछ दिनों में न्यूनतम वायु प्रदूषण दर्ज किया गया है। इसका पहला प्रभाव यह पड़ा कि सांस लेने के लिए साफ हवा मिलने लगी है। यही नहीं, फेफड़ों को नुकसान पहुंचाने वाली नाइट्रोजन ऑक्साइड का उत्सर्जन भी काफी कम हो गया है। नाइट्रोजन ऑक्साइड मुख्य रूप से वाहनों और कारखानों से निकलने वाले धुएं में होती है। लेकिन पूर्णबंदी की वजह से शहरों में साफ आसमान दिखाई दे रहा है और पर्यावरण की स्थिति काफी बेहतर हुई है। इससे पूरे देश के साथ-साथ दिल्ली और उसके आसपास के क्षेत्रों में प्रदूषण का स्तर काफी कम हुआ है। देशव्यापी पूर्णबंदी के चलते वाहन, कारखाने और कार्बन उत्सर्जन करने वाले तमाम कारक बंद हैं। इसके साथ ही देशभर में निर्माण कार्य जैसी गतिविधियों पर रोक लगी हुई है। पश्चिमी विक्षोभ के चलते बूदाबंदी का क्रम भी जारी है। इन वजहों से भी प्रदूषण में कमी आई है। वरना दिल्ली-एनसीआर सहित देश के कई शहरों के लोग जहरीली हवा में सांस ले रहे होते।

जाहिर है, जो काम अब तक सरकार नहीं कर पाई, वह आज पूर्णबंदी के सकारात्मक परिणाम के रूप में देखने को मिल रहा है। तमाम कारखानों के बंद होने की वजह से गंगा-यमुना सहित तमाम नदियों का पानी अब साफ दिखने लगा है। देश की सबसे बड़ी और पवित्र माने जाने वाली गंगा में सबसे ज्यादा प्रदूषण कारखानों से निकलने वाले अवशिष्टों के कारण ही फैलता है। हालांकि, गंगा को साफ करने की कोशिश में सरकारों ने साल-दर-साल कितनी ही योजनाएं और समितियां बनाईं, जम कर पैसा भी फूका, लेकिन ऐसे नतीजे कभी नहीं दिखे, जो पूर्णबंदी के दौरान सामने आए हैं।

प्रदूषण में कमी जैसा बड़ा बदलाव पहले कभी देखने को नहीं मिला। साफ है, पूर्णबंदी ने यह संदेश दिया है कि लोग चाहें तो प्रदूषण को कम कर सकते हैं। यही वजह है कि दुनिया के अलग-अलग हिस्सों से तमाम लोगों ने अपनी सरकारों को कोरोना संकट टल जाने के बाद हर साल कुछ दिन का वक्त प्रकृति के लिए भी देने का विचार दिया है।

दुनिया भर में प्रदूषण को लेकर हर साल चौंकाने वाली रिपोर्टें आ रही हैं। वैश्विक निकाय संयुक्त राष्ट्र से लेकर पर्यावरण पर काम करने वाले संस्थान और विश्वविद्यालय तक पर्यावरण को बचाने की जद्दोजहद कर रहे हैं। लेकिन जब यह तथ्य सामने आता है कि हर साल वायु प्रदूषण की वजह से लाखों लोगों की मौत हो रही है, बच्चों को छोटी उम्र में ही कई समस्याओं का सामना करना पड़ रहा है, तो प्रदूषण से निपटने के सरकारों के कदम सवालों के घेरे में आ जाते हैं। स्टेट ऑफ ग्लोबल एअर, 2019 की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक भारत में साल 2017 में करीब बारह लाख लोगों की मौत वायु प्रदूषण की वजह से हुई थी। इसमें कहा गया है कि वायु प्रदूषण दुनिया भर में मृत्यु दर का पांचवां प्रमुख कारक है। कुपोषण, शराब और शारीरिक निष्क्रियता की तुलना में वायु प्रदूषण की वजह से ज्यादा मौतें होती हैं। हर साल सड़क दुर्घटना या मलेरिया की तुलना में वायु प्रदूषण से होने वाली बीमारियों से ज्यादा लोग मरते हैं। ऐसे में इन सारी तस्वीरों और आंकड़ों को देख कर पूर्णबंदी के दौरान ढेरों कष्ट और पीड़ा झेलते हुए भी लोगों का इस बात को लेकर खुश होना स्वाभाविक है कि चलो, सांस लेने के लिए साफ हवा तो मिलने लगी।

लेकिन सवाल है कि क्या कोरोना विषाणु ने प्रदूषण की मार झेलती दुनिया को वह मौका दिया है, जिसमें वह ठहर कर जीवनशैली में बदलाव करने पर विचार कर सके? दरअसल, अब हमें इस बात पर गंभीरता से विचार करना होगा कि हम अपनी जीवनशैली को कैसे बेहतर बनाएं, जिसमें पर्याप्त संसाधनों में रहते हुए पर्यावरण को भी बचाए रख सकें। पर्यावरणविदों का मानना है कि सरकार को पर्यावरण की कीमत पर विकास के मामले में इस संकेत को खतरे की घंटी के तौर पर लेना चाहिए। गौरतलब है कि इस समय तकरीबन सवा सौ करोड़ लोगों के साथ भारत में पूर्णबंदी के जरिए कोरोना से लड़ाई लड़ी जा रही है। इससे सामान्य दिनों में वायु गुणवत्ता सूचकांक पचास फीसद से भी कम हो गया है। यह ठीक है कि बीते कुछ सालों में वायु प्रदूषण से निपटने के लिए केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों ने कई कदम उठाए। लेकिन

फिर भी वायु प्रदूषण से निपटने में हम फिसड्डी साबित हुए। जाहिर है, हमारे प्रयासों और इच्छाशक्ति में कहीं न कहीं कमी रही होगी। आज आवश्यकता इस बात की है कि हमारी सरकारें एक-दूसरे पर दोषारोपण करने के बजाय देश हित में ठोस कदम उठाएं। लेकिन अफसोस की बात है कि प्रदूषण जैसे गंभीर विषय को भी इतने सालों में सरकारें केवल कुछ तात्कालिक उपायों के सहारे ही हल करना चाहती हैं। वास्तव में अगर हमारी सरकारें प्रदूषण से लड़ना चाहती हैं तो उन्हें इस समस्या के प्रति एक परिपक्व और ईमानदार नजरिया अपनाना होगा। समस्या की जड़ को समझ कर उस पर प्रहार करना होगा, लोगों के सामने हल रखने होंगे, उन्हें विकल्प देने होंगे न कि महज फरमान। गौर करने वाली बात यह है कि आबादी के लिहाज से सबसे ज्यादा नुकसान भारत का ही होने वाला है। इसलिए भारत को अपनी जिम्मेदारी बखूबी समझते हुए तत्काल कुछ सार्थक और ठोस उपाय करने होंगे, जो कोरोना जैसी महामारियों से बचाने के साथ पर्यावरण को भी बचाएं। अगर पर्यावरण बचेगा, तभी हम महामारियों से बच पाएंगे। वायु प्रदूषण को निश्चित रूप से नियंत्रित किया जा सकता है। दुनिया के कई देशों ने तो इसमें काफी हद तक सफलता पाई भी है। लेकिन इसके लिए हम सभी नागरिकों और संगठनों से लेकर निजी कंपनियों और सरकारों तक को एक साथ मिलकर प्रयास करना होगा। सबको अपनी जिम्मेदारियों को समझना होगा। भारत में वायु प्रदूषण को नियंत्रित करने के लिए नियम-कानूनों की कोई कमी नहीं है। पर समस्या इन पर ईमानदारी से अमल की है। प्रदूषण नियंत्रण संबंधी कानूनों को आज तक कहीं भी सख्ती से लागू नहीं किया गया। सवाल है कि क्या जिस तरह से पूर्णबंदी लागू कराने को लेकर सरकार ने तत्परता और सख्ती दिखाई, वैसा ही कदम दूसरे मामलों में नहीं उठाया जा सकता?

आज जब देश भर की सारी गतिविधियां ठप हैं और वायु प्रदूषण में लगातार कमी आ रही है, तब कम से कम केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों को अपने यहां प्रदूषण से संबंधित विस्तृत अध्ययन करने की जरूरत है, ताकि दिल्ली सहित पूरे देश में पूर्णबंदी के बाद प्रदूषण में कमी लाने के लिए भी ऐसे ही ठोस कदम उठाए जा सकें। पूर्णबंदी के इस दौर से आमजन और सरकारों को यह सबक लेना चाहिए कि कुछ सख्त और सकारात्मक कदमों को उठाने भर से वायु प्रदूषण को काफी कम किया जा सकता है।
