



The Loose Thread Magazine presents...

TALE OF PANDEMIC IN INDIA

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To India,

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The Loose Thread Magazine presents...

PHOTOGRAPHS, POEMS, ARTICLES & NARRATIVES

VOL 02, ISSUE 02, May - June 2021

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FOUNDERS' NOTE

We are pleased to announce the publication of Volume 2, Issue 2 on 'The Tale of Pandemics in India'. Through this publication, we want to explore the Covid-19 pandemic from all sides and perspectives, ranging from the challenges faced by India to the question of vaccine nationalism that is being raised by many developing countries across the world.



The Issue features Roshini Srivastava's cover story on 'Coronavirus: A warning from History' in which she draws a parallel between Covid-19 pandemic and the Spanish influenza that devastated the lives of millions across the world. You will also find an analysis titled 'Pandemic and the Crisis of the Indian State' in which Hunardeep Kaur explores the shortcomings of the Indian state during the pandemic. Aparna Singh takes a step ahead to provide the gendered aspect of the same through her report 'Pandemic Toll on Women' which argues that the pandemic has affected men and women differently. Meghna's analysis on 'Vaccine Nationalism: Is a Multilateral Approach Required?' forces audiences to ponder upon the question, can a multilateral cooperative effort to vaccinate vulnerable people globally on a priority basis eradicate Covid-19? Ekta Goyal's 'Black Marketing and Hoarding during the Pandemic' brings to the forefront some of the prominent challenges of the pandemic – black marketing and hoarding. To get a perspective on how the spread of the coronavirus was motivated by violating Covid-19 guidelines, don't forget to read Khushi Agrawal's article titled 'Façade of Responsible Citizens: Flouting Covid-19 Protocols'. Following is reflection on the samsara cycle of Hinduism in Violina Das's 'Mortals and Immortality' which will definitely lighten your mood. Finally, the article section ends with Saumya Sen's commentary on 'Vaccine War Within and Outside India' which glimpses upon India's stance towards vaccine ban and how India lost its self-sufficiency in vaccine production a decade ago.

The poetry section follows next which will help you engage creatively with the effects of the pandemic on human mind. Dewang Mishra's 'The Future of India' is a piece of work that you cannot miss as it will take you in a state of trance. Kiran Goswami's 'Yin and Yang' is a poem on the Chinese philosophy of dualism which will give you a roller-coaster ride as it is rigged with beautiful poetic tonality. Finally, Rupa Dangwal's work on 'A Memoir of Diseased India' is a poetic experiment of its kind, with India as a body fighting the virus. Volume 02 Issue 02 of May - June, 2021 also brings evocative photographs captured by our young and talented photographers Upasna Mohapatra, Pooja Yadav, Yogesh Painkra, Gunjan Mitra and our chief photographer Laura Pedrotti from Brazil. Together, our team has worked incessantly to make this Issue possible, especially during the pandemic. We really hope that our audience is able to connect with it as much as we do.

And, if you haven't read our previous publication yet, we urge you to go back to Volume 2, Issue 1 on 'Conversations of Today' to read some of the reports and case studies on the role played by Barefoot College and other NGOs in Rajasthan's transformation, poems and photographs highlighting the failed voices of emancipation, femicide in Brazil and violence against women during Covid-19, among many others.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Riya Mohan'.

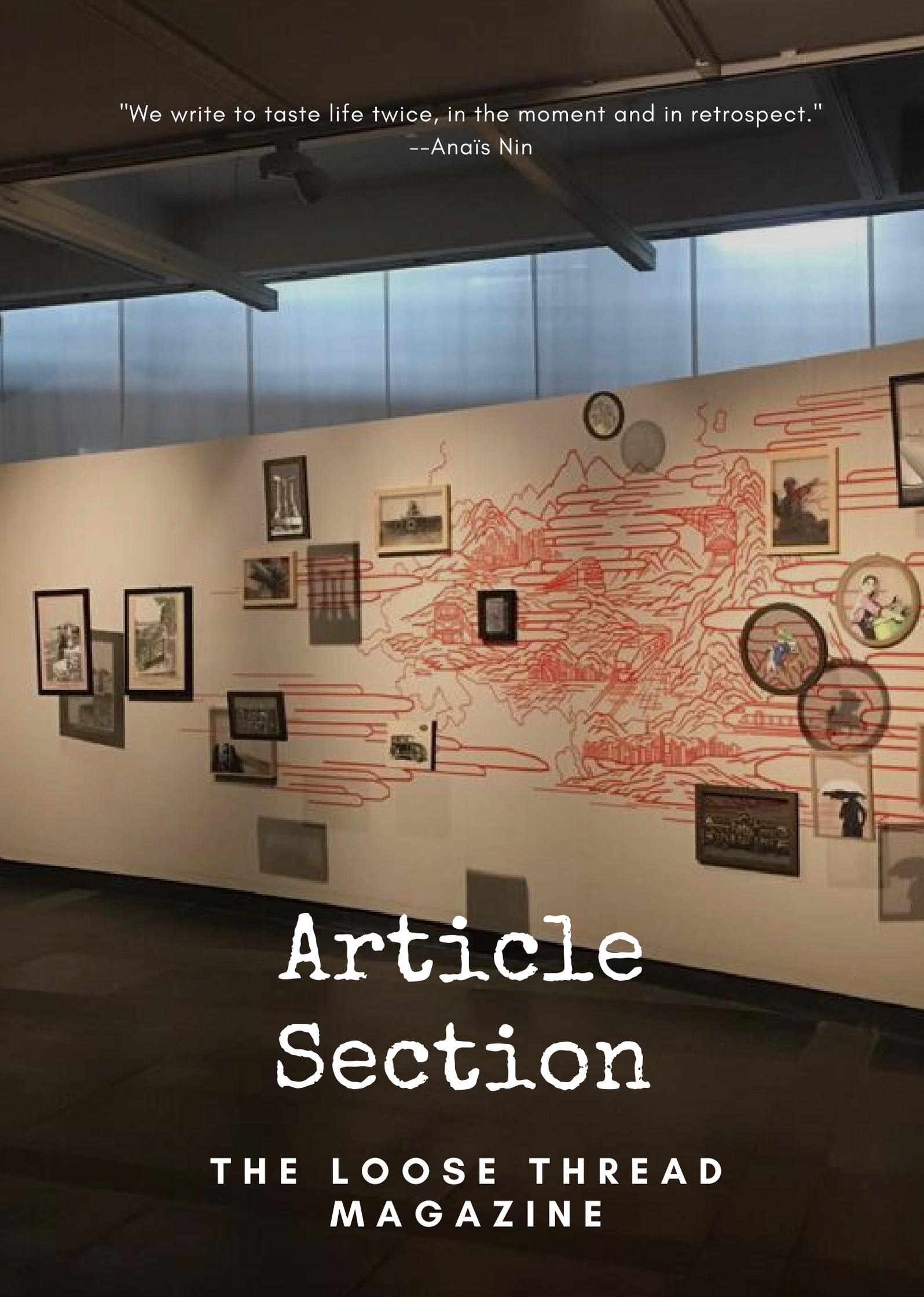
RIYA MOHAN

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shamim'.

MOHAMMAD SHAMIM

"We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect."

--Anaïs Nin

A gallery wall featuring a large, intricate red line drawing of a landscape with mountains and a city. The drawing is surrounded by numerous framed pictures of various sizes and styles, including portraits, landscapes, and abstract works. The wall is set against a large window with a view of a city skyline.

Article Section

THE LOOSE THREAD
MAGAZINE



Photograph by Riya Mohan

[An Analysis]

Pandemic and the Crisis of the Indian State

By Hunardeep Kaur

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At a time when the country is knee-deep in the humanitarian and health crisis leaving the survival of ordinary citizens hampered, and death and disease becoming an everyday lived reality for many, the incumbent government continues to be unmindful of the crisis, unconcerned about its basic responsibilities towards the citizens and unaffected by the pervading loss, grief and death. By acting in its own interests i.e. those of power and supremacy, the government has demonstrated apathy and hubris. That even now, amid the crisis, the Prime Minister and his crew would come up with ways to save their own image and seek to manipulate the media, instead of making efforts towards ensuring the availability and accessibility of health facilities and supply of medical resources, goes on to say a lot about the priorities of this government (1).

The distorted priorities of the government become all the more evident with the outrageous declaration of the Central Vista Redevelopment Project as an “essential service” (2). Amid the overburdened and collapsing health infrastructure and tottering economy, wherein the citizens are being denied the dignity to live, the right to health and even the right to dignity in death, the government is basking in its hubris and leaving the country and its people to fend for themselves. This is sufficient proof to claim that the government has utterly failed not just because it has outrightly refused to look at the ground reality but also because it has become dysfunctional as far as democracy is concerned.

The pompous election rallies held by the ruling party amid the raging pandemic further testify to how its priorities are skewed with the focus entirely being on power enlargement and expansion of the created personality cult of the ‘supreme leader’. Along with the election rallies, the Kumbh Mela festivities held on a large scale without any rules of social distancing have acted as another super spreader event and brought to

the forefront, the recklessness of the government and the absurdity of its priorities. And yet, it continues to be in deliberate denial of its own doings and of the crisis that it has brought upon the country.

When faced with a crisis or challenge to authority, the approach adopted by the incumbent government has always been either to evade the criticism by distracting the masses or by creating an illusion of stability and well-being in order to hide the flaws. Following the crisis of the first wave of the pandemic and the nationwide lockdown that devastated the common masses, the government glorified that India had successfully dealt with the pandemic when globally other countries still struggled to control the rising cases. Underneath this false claim hid the failure of the government to take responsibility for a crisis of its own making – the crisis of the migrant workers, the crisis that was an outcome of one of the most stringent lockdowns imposed in any country.



Photo by Upasna Mohapatra

(1): Singh, K.D., & Mozur, P. (2021, April 25). *As Outbreak Rages, India Orders Critical Social Media Posts to be Taken Down*. The New York Times.

(2): Ali, S. (2021, May 15). *Watch: Nero's Pride: Not Even a Pandemic Can Stop the Central Vista Project*. The Wire.



Photograph by Riya Mohan

That the government turned a deaf ear to the warnings of an incoming second wave of Coronavirus is made clear in The Lancet's report about India's COVID-19 Emergency (3). To quote from the journal, "Yet before the second wave of cases of COVID-19 began to mount in early March, Indian Minister of Health Harsh Vardhan declared that India was in the "endgame" of the pandemic. The impression from the government was that India had beaten COVID-19 after several months of low case counts, despite repeated warnings of the dangers of a second wave and the emergence of new strains". Calling it a "self-inflicted national catastrophe", Lancet asserts, "the federal government has an essential role in explaining to the public the necessity of masking, social distancing, halting mass gatherings, voluntary quarantine, and testing. Modi's actions in attempting to stifle criticism and open discussion during the crisis are inexcusable".

The lack of many resources including vaccines, oxygen support, hospital beds and proper testing along with the inaccurate and false data pertaining to COVID-19 have aggravated the existing health crisis. The central government's attempt to push the entire blame of its own inadequacies and faults onto the state governments has been another problematic aspect. Moreover, such inadequacy has also given rise to another crisis that is deeply political in nature – a crisis of political leadership and cooperation. Instead of working in tandem with the state governments, the central government has chosen to dust off its hands from the crisis by putting the entire onus onto the state governments.

This shirking off from the responsibility towards the public is accompanied by the ever increasing concern about its public image and the repeated attempts to conceal the tarnished image. It is time to acknowledge the flaws in its leadership instead of taking a narcissistic approach to power and supremacy. There should be a realization of the multiple crises that it has inflicted upon the country and its people with utmost disregard for the lives of common citizens, let alone the foundational democratic principles and constitutional values of the country.

(3): (2021, May 08): *India's Covid-19 Emergency. The Lancet.*



Photograph by Yogesh Painkra

[A Report]

Pandemic Toll on Women

By Aparna Singh

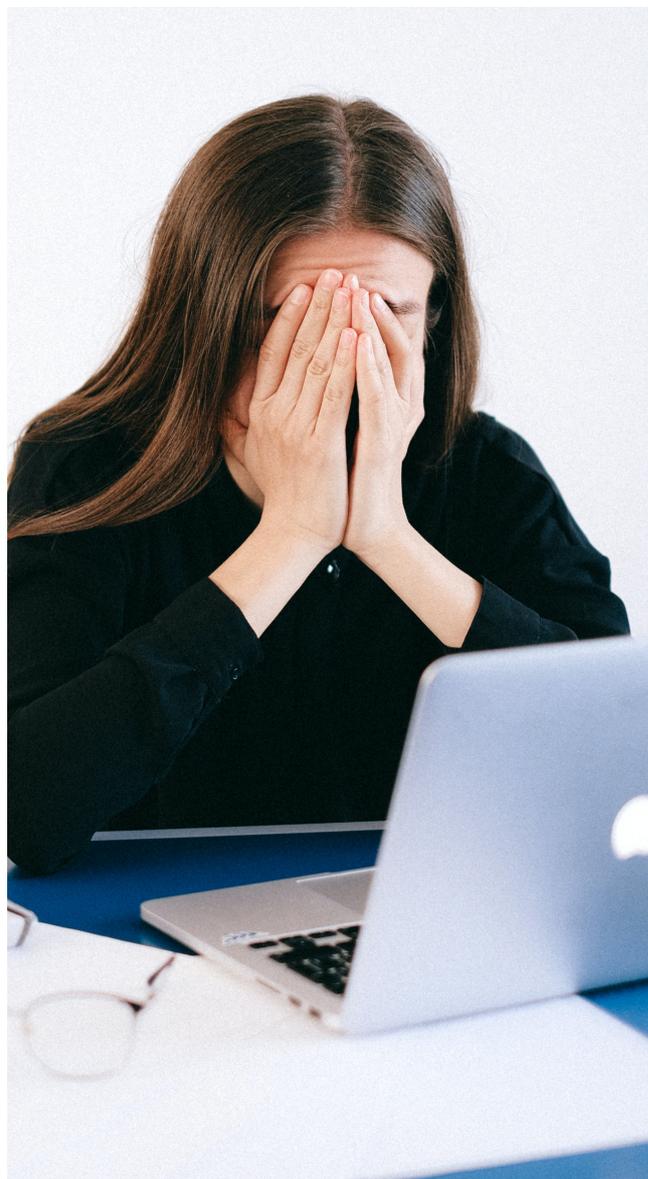
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COVID-19 pandemic has affected every segment – from those hailing from affluent societies to workers with meagre savings – creating rifts, discrimination, and inequality among many different sections of the society. With steady decline in extreme global poverty for about 21 years, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the trend by pushing about 96 million people into extreme poverty once again, 47 million of whom were women or girls (1). With the total number of 435 million women and girls living on USD 1.90 or less, the pandemic has widened an already prevalent gender gap that has left countless women and girls unable to grapple with the crashing economy and making them more easily exploitable.

With only 18% of working-age women being employed, even before 2020 in India, as compared to 75% of their male counterparts, it should come as no surprise that the gender employment gap has worsened during and after the first wave of the pandemic, as stated in the report “State of Working India 2021:One Year of COVID-19” (2). The women in India face gender discrimination in employability in terms of lack of good jobs, restrictive social norms, the burden of household work, etc. Even as new entrants, women have poorer options for employability as compared to men.

In fact, in India, women are more likely to enter as daily-wage workers than men, who are more likely to be self-employed. Self-employed workers earn about ₹13,000 while a daily-wage worker earns a significantly less amount of ₹8000, signifying that not only do women enter the workforce at a more precarious stage, but they also earn less than men. The nation-wide lockdown, imposed during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, had much more adverse impact on women than on men with only about 19% of women having employment security in contrast to 61% of men, as reported by the Centre

for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt Ltd (3). Even at the end of the year, 47% of women who had lost employment had not returned to work. This matched against 7% of men who did not return to work.



A report by UN Women states, “Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex” (4). Although the exploitation of women is not limited to any particular culture or country, women belonging to economically weakened sections of the society are at a greater risk due to the aggravated

(1): (2020): *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19*. UN Women.

(2): *State of Working India 2021: One Year of COVID-19*. Azim Premji University.

(3): (2021, May 17). *Socio-Economic Impact of Pandemic on Women*. Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd.

(4): (2020). *UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. UN Women.

impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. From America to Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect women from all walks of life. In Latin America and the Caribbean, an estimated 18 million additional women will lose regular access to modern contraceptives because of the pandemic, and in Japan, close to one million women – the majority of whom worked in temporary and part-time positions—left the labour force between December and April (5).

Globally, 58% of employed women work in informal employment, and estimates suggest that during the first month of the pandemic, informal workers globally lost an average of 60% of their income. There has also been a spike in levels of domestic violence against women during the COVID-19 quarantine. As stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, “We know lockdowns and quarantines are essential to suppressing COVID-19. But they can trap women with abusive partners” (6). Reports of domestic violence in France have increased by 30% since the lockdown began on March 17th, and similar increases have been reported across Europe and North America.

Most glaringly, police reports in China showed that domestic violence levels had tripled during the outbreak. A study conducted by Krishnakumar A. and Verma S., “Understanding Domestic Violence in India during COVID-19: a Routine Activity Approach” concludes that the changes in the routine activities of people during the COVID-19 lockdown period provided more opportunities to the perpetrators of domestic violence (7). One of the glaring inequalities brought on by the pandemic is the growing domestic work, done primarily by women without any economic compensation.



Photograph by Yogesh Painkra

(5): (2020, August): *Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Contraceptives in the LAC Region*. UNFPA.

(6): Guterres, Antonio. *Make the Prevention of and Redress of Violence Against Women a Key Part of National Response Plans For Covid-19*. United Nations.

(7): Krishnakumar, A., & Verma, S. (2021, March 10): *Understanding Domestic Violence in India During COVID-19: A Routinely Activity Approach*. Asian Journal of Criminology.

The Indian Working Survey 2020 found that the hours spent on paid work by employed men remained almost the same as before the pandemic. In contrast, the number of hours spent on domestic work increased manifold for women. In September, the share of women doing domestic work for more than four hours without any economic compensation increased to 50% from 10-20% in February – March.

Globally, girls and women on an average do three times more unpaid care work than men, a number that skyrockets as all household chores had to be managed at home, and while more than 1.52 billion (87%) children are at home instead of school. Before women spent 4.1 hours globally on domestic work while men contributed to 1.7 hours, but due to the pandemic, the burden of unpaid care and domestic work has exploded.

This combined with poverty and lack of basic infrastructure has added to the women's unpaid workload. As Mohammad Naciri, head of UN Women in Asia describes, "An even greater burden is placed on women where health systems are overloaded or schools are closed, as care for children or sick family members largely falls on women". The hardest-hit industrial sectors of the economy often have more women employees than men. In sectors like food services, retail, and entertainment, women are overrepresented (8).

For example, 40% of all employed women – 510 million women globally – work in hard-hit sectors, compared to 36.6% of employed men. This is particularly worrisome because, as mentioned in the policy brief, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Women" by the United Nations, "Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector (9).

They have less access to social protection and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is, therefore, less than that of men". Within some of these sectors, informal employment is common, and the workers are often subjected to low pay, poor working conditions, and lack of social protection (pension, healthcare, unemployment insurance). Many workers in these industries were oppressed even before the pandemic.

The oppression and the exploitation here combined with the ongoing global pandemic create a bleak scenario for workers, most of whom are women. Surprisingly, women are also seen working during the pandemic to sustain their households and family expenses. In many parts of India for instance, despite the imposition of lockdowns, they moved out to work. This highlights the economic pressure on women and a lack of social security which makes this group a "vulnerable" one.

Gita Gopinath, the IMF chief economist, said in the October 2020 World Economic Outlook, "Not only will the incidence of extreme poverty rise for the first time in over two decades, but inequality is set to increase because the crisis has disproportionately affected women, the informally employed, and those with relatively lower educational attainment" (10).

The pandemic will continue to have a snowball effect on the lives of women and girls for years to come, and ergo, on the economy of the world. The time is now for governments across the world to take necessary steps towards empowering women as well as towards their safety and economic security.

(8): (2020, September 04): *COVID-19 has Gendered Inequality. These Charts Show What we can do About it.* World Economic Forum.

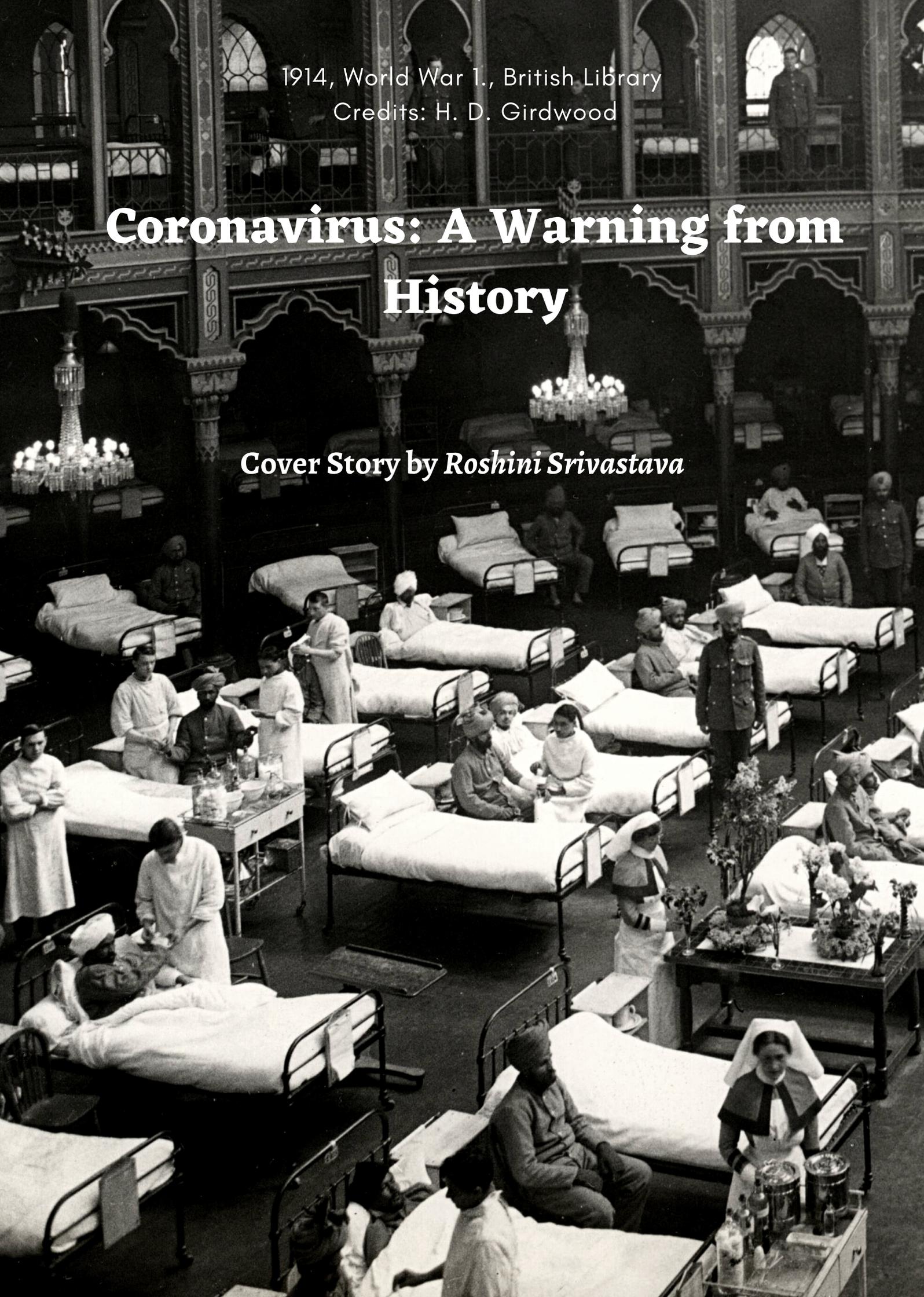
(9): (2020, December 9). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women.* United Nations.

(10): (2020, October 29). *Pandemic has Worsened Gender Inequality in India, says Oxfam.* Livemint.

1914, World War I., British Library
Credits: H. D. Girdwood

Coronavirus: A Warning from History

Cover Story by Roshini Srivastava



Grief is considered to be an almost peculiar thing. While the current pandemic we are facing has allowed small sprouts of happiness to be nurtured, it is within this overwhelming grief that humans are forced to take a pause and reflect upon the present as well as the past. Parallels can be drawn in history between the Spanish influenza epidemic and the ongoing COVID-19 virus outbreak, with striking similarities.

The influenza outbreak in 1918 was a tragedy of unbelievable scale, with over 500 million having contracted the virus with 50 million people documented to be dead, although undocumented numbers have often been speculated to be much higher. A common misconception is that the influenza pandemic caused by the H1N1 influenza originated in Spain, but historical and epidemiological data cannot pinpoint the geographical origins of that deadly killer.

In an ironic twist of misfortune, the worldwide pandemic was given the name Spanish influenza because Spain, being a neutral country at the time of World War I, was the only one actually talking about it and not imposing censorship as in countries like the USA, giving the impression of being the hardest hit country.

Similar to the initial shock and response to the coronavirus, people in 1918 were not prepared to deal with such a hard blow. With the people in power much more focused on winning the war at hand, the general public was fed placating lies of only a minor flu being at large, not a deadly virus with such a high mortality rate. Both the influenza virus and the coronavirus cause respiratory diseases and even have similar symptoms such as chills, cough, sore throat, headache, fever, among others.

However, a major distinction is the age group that the influenza virus targeted. COVID-19, as known, affects the very young and very old the

most, while the ones in between have a higher recovery or lower positivity rate; the influenza virus on the other hand crippled the young population ranging between 15-40 years old, the working population that threatened to put economies to a halt.

While the virus had a sudden outbreak causing almost one third of the population to suffer, the lack of documentation and modern science prevented an accurate pathogenesis from being curated. From what data survived, we know that the pandemic came in three major waves. The first wave gathered a lot of criticism from the public, for the government failed to take any serious preventive or even precautionary measures, something that the citizens of the 21st century might be able to relate with.

A novel idea that similarly developed at that time was that of 'herd immunity', because Spanish influenza chose to show itself at a time when countries were sending their young men in heaps to fight a major war. While the first wave of the influenza epidemic was devastating, the second wave was absolutely relentless. By May-June of 1918, the virus had spread to Asian countries from Europe, and India was the one which suffered in its ruthless path.

During the first wave, the influenza virus confined itself to Bombay and claimed about 1600 lives, but the second wave brought the country down to its knees, much like the second wave of COVID-19 in India. The influenza pandemic took an unimaginable 15-20 million lives in India alone. The virus back then had a higher mortality rate and the virus we have to deal with right now has a higher infectious and positivity rate, but that doesn't change the most single, glaring fact: the government was not prepared to fight it at all, and history has chosen to repeat itself a century later.

Of course, there are many conditions to take into account such as the lack of knowledge and facilities to provide healthcare or even develop a vaccine, but over the years, researchers have put several theories forward to explain why the virus was such a deadly one. The most common one is that as the normal course of any virus goes, those with a severe response to the disease are isolated and kept inside, while others with only a mild or asymptomatic strain go about with working and earning a daily wage. However, normality took a reverse route when soldiers who were severely affected were sent back home on crowded trains and to crowded health camps where they spread the deadly virus, causing a feral growth and contraction rate.

It might be presumptuous to say that humans never learn, no matter how many times history is repeated, but one finds it hard to argue when even today in India, we are forced to see people surrendering to the viral disease and a climbing curve of deaths that could have been prevented. Factually, the deployment of soldiers in the war expedited the spread of the infection, but the end of the war caused a whole new resurgence, as soldiers began to demobilize from crowded army camps and began to go back home. While most of the world saw a drop in the curve by the end of 1919, the lessons it left behind should've been a warning for what could come again.

Health infrastructure was in dire shortage, medical personnel were in limited numbers, economies were suffering because of lack of healthy workers and families were being torn apart because once again, people in India didn't have a responsible political body to turn to for help. It can stump one to think about how people even managed psychologically, considering there was no social media or means of proper communication to keep them in touch with loved ones. Even though history did repeat itself to some extent, it also proved to be fruitful in pushing modern science and medical research. The biological and medical properties that conferred virulence to the influenza virus could not be studied before. However, the heavy severity and worldwide panic it caused helped create a breakthrough in developing antiviral drugs. It is a hard reality to accept that the corona virus will actually never go away in totality, just like the influenza virus never did. We just have to make ourselves bigger and stronger around it. That is how the grief of this depressingly comical irony works. It will never go away, we will never forget the shadowed burden we've all had to collectively share, but we all will someday be bigger, and happier around it.





One of the Largest Covid-19 Vaccination Centres in India

TIPS FOR VACCINATION SITE



Double mask if possible, practice social distancing and sanitise hands frequently



Do not come empty stomach, have your food at least 2 hrs before coming for vaccination



If you have COVID symptoms or doubt exposure, test and defer the date of vaccination



If you've recently recovered or are recovering from COVID, please reach out to your doctor for advice on vaccination

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Photograph by Riya Mohan

[An Analysis]

Vaccine Nationalism: Is a Multilateral Approach Required?

By Meghna Yadav

“Covid vaccine nationalism would prolong the pandemic and not shorten it.”

World Health Organization

Covid-19 has curtailed civil liberties, destroyed livelihoods and ravaged economies all across the globe. Most countries underwent a lockdown but that could only help contain the infection and not reverse it. The permanent solution could only be a vaccine. As more and more vaccines were discovered, it was seen that COVID-19 ceased to be just a humanitarian issue and evolved into a problem of political economy of inequality of access between the rich and the poor, between the developed and the developing.

“Nationalism” is a wide-ranging political concept that relates to the idea of prioritizing the interest of one’s nation over others for economic, security or other reasons. The recent approach of countries towards procurement of COVID vaccines has more or less been ultra nationalist, thereby bringing to light the concept of ‘vaccine nationalism’. The term has essentially been coined in the wake of dozens of governments in wealthy countries scrambling to sign deals with pharmaceutical companies to secure vaccines for their own populations — limiting the stock for others. A growing number of countries are now opting for the ‘my-nation-first’ approach which is a major threat to global health security.

This wave of vaccine nationalism is perilous in more ways than one. Wealthy countries enter pre-purchase contracts with manufacturers and stockpile vaccines before they are made available in other countries. For instance, the US, the UK, Japan, and the EU have spent billions of dollars on deals with vaccine developers such as Pfizer Inc, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca, even before their efficacy was proven. They corner as many doses as possible at the cost of global access. The stockpiling is undeniably disproportionate to the country’s coronavirus caseload and populations. For instance, Australia,

Canada, and Japan have less than one per cent of the world's coronavirus cases but have still ordered more doses of vaccines than all of Latin America and the Caribbean — a region with more than 17 percent of global coronavirus cases (1). Countries like India and China have only been able to keep up owing to their domestic vaccine manufacturing capacities.

What is further problematic is that wealthy nations with enough vaccine supplies aim to vaccinate their entire population including even the low-risk individuals. This shows their little or no sensitivity towards nations with high numbers of infected individuals. A practice like this, if continues, can prolong the pandemic in low resource countries for many years to come. According to the researchers at Northeastern University in Boston, such a scenario could cause twice as many deaths as against distributing them globally, on a priority basis (2).

However, such nationalist behaviour isn’t the first one of its kind. In 2009 as well when the H1N1 Swine Flu swamped the nations worldwide and killed as many as 2,84,000 people globally, high-income countries like the States and the European Union had secured sizeable advanced orders for vaccines which were developed in 7 months, moving the low-income countries out of the picture. Exports were made only after domestic needs were fulfilled. This further highlights how the distribution of vaccines has mostly depended upon high-income countries’ purchasing power. A similar distribution of vaccines in the current scenario provides a glimpse of the reality of the world’s poor who do not have such access to vaccines, as many vaccination drives are only limited to urban areas, with only a few rural areas having the chance to avail such services.

(1): Kumar, Rajeesh. (2021, January 4). *The Perils of Vaccine Nationalism*. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

(2): Kumar, Rajeesh. (2021, January 4). *The Perils of Vaccine Nationalism*. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

A paper published in the British Medical Journal suggested that governments could learn a lesson from the earlier pandemics in which nations had sought to monopolize vaccine supply. The paper also warned about such practices being a threat to global herd immunity as such monopolisation can prove detrimental to global public health. Moreover, what is interesting is that vaccine nationalism in fact, runs against the global public health principles as the international laws do not prevent the formation of pre-purchase agreements (3).

Vaccines are also emerging as a means to expand a nation's power in the international setup. With the states' reluctance to share vaccines and with shortages crippling WHO's supply, more and more countries are turning to Russia and China, looking for deals. As per reports, the vaccine produced by Sinopharm of China has already been approved by many countries like the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Serbia, Morocco, Hungary and Pakistan.

On the other hand, the other prominent Chinese vaccine manufactured by Sinovac has also been approved by South American nations like Bolivia, Brazil and Chile, as well as Asia's Indonesia and Turkey. Besides, the Russian vaccine Sputnik-V has been approved by a number of countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Countries also enter tacit or explicit agreements with local manufacturers to promote and protect global market shares for their vaccines.

The global race for vaccine development and distribution has also heightened tensions among big powers. There have been practices of stockpiling, increasing export bans and COVID-19 hacking allocations. Reuters, a news agency based in the UK, has previously documented how hackers linked to Iran, Vietnam, North Korea, South Korea, China, and Russia have on separate

occasions been accused by cybersecurity experts or government officials of trying to steal information about the virus and its potential treatments.

The Serum Institute of India was supposed to supply five million doses per month to Bangladesh as per the contract. However, after supplying about two million doses in February, it announced its decision of putting a temporary ban on such exports, owing to the rising cases of coronavirus in India. This move has undeniably jeopardised global vaccine supply and has also delivered a lethal blow to India's 'Vaccine Friendship' policy. It seems as if vaccine nationalism has replaced 'Vaccine Maitri' in India, as is the case in many Western nations which prompt countries like Bangladesh to look for other options like the Chinese or Russian alternatives.

Countries are also restricting supplies of raw material required to make vaccines. Adopting a nation first approach, the Biden administration invoked the Defence Production Act to block export of raw material required for the production of vaccines. This turned out to be a cause of concern for India because it could severely affect India's domestic production capacity in the time of crisis. But interestingly, India, earlier last year, had imposed a similar ban on export of HCQ (hydroxychloroquine) which is an anti-malarial drug (4). Both these moves temporarily escalated tensions between the two states. However, these tensions eased out later on.

The given approach has also received criticism from the moral standpoint. It puts the government into a dilemma of prioritizing between the needs of their citizens or fulfilling their moral responsibility towards mankind in general. There are two primary sides of the debate here. On one hand, governments are

(3): Rutschman, Ana. (2020, June 17). *How Vaccine Nationalism Could Block Vulnerable Populations' Access to COVID-19 Vaccines*. Down to Earth.

(4): Chandna, Himani. (2020, April 5). *India Bans Export of Hydroxychloroquine but Trump is Counting on Modi for Urgent Supply*. The Print.

under severe pressure to cater to their citizens' needs but at the same time indulgence in vaccine nationalism would be an act of perfidy to our global responsibilities. Some argue that vaccine nationalism is an exaggerated threat elicited from an idealist perspective of the world. They also believe that when nation states prioritise the health of their citizens and governments barrel for vaccine supplies, such outbreaks of nationalism among capitals are inevitable. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization, however, warns of a "catastrophic moral failure" as a result of inequalities in vaccine availability.

To conclude, vaccine nationalism may be the need of the hour, but it is morally reprehensible and an immature approach to reduce global transmissions. If countries do not adequately respond to the moral challenge to protect themselves first, the country might become COVID free but global economic activity will continue to remain incapacitated until the pandemic is won over at a global level. If the worst hit countries still fail to procure vaccines, the disease would continue to impede global supply chains and consequently, the economies around the world. Vaccine hoarding would thus, only prolong the pandemic, causing more economic and social damage. A study by RAND (November 2020) depicts that if middle and lower-income countries do not have access to vaccines, the cost to the global economy would amount to approximately \$288 billion per year.

India's current COVID crisis is a perfect example of how this approach has abysmally backfired and as India creates the risk of new mutants posing a global threat. It has only now brought the realization as to how this approach has the potential to backfire and further prolong the pandemic. But many would want to ask, what is the solution to that? Well, instead of vaccine nationalism, a multilateral vaccine distribution system should be adopted. Such a multilateral cooperative effort made to vaccinate vulnerable people globally on a priority basis would ultimately be in each nation's self-interest in the longer run. Vaccine multilateralism can more effectively prevent the spread of the coronavirus and bring incentives for both national and global economies in comparison to an utterly nationalistic approach.





Photograph by Riya Mohan

[An Article]

Facade of Responsible Citizens: Flouting Covid-19 Protocols

By Khushi Agrawal

Vol 2: Issue 02, The Loose Thread Magazine

The second wave of Covid-19 in India turned out to be more hazardous and risky than the first wave. And yet, there have been instances when protocols related to the pandemic were not adhered to, neither by the politicians nor by the citizens. Coronavirus cases of West Bengal in March 2021 were way less than those of other states in India, but when the Bengal election rallies took place by three different parties – TMC, BJP, and Sanyukta Morcha without following any proper Covid-19 protocols, cases in the state surged rapidly. Experts therefore connect the rapid spread of Covid-19 to crowded, mask-less rallies in every corner of the state. However, this is not an isolated event.

The spread of the virus is also attributed to religious events such as Kumbh Mela and Char Dham Yatra of Uttarakhand. Despite the fact that standards were set in place to permit only those people who have their RT-PCR report negative, other guidelines such as those of social distancing and wearing a proper mask were flouted. Millions of devotees were seen taking a dip in the Ganga without any fear of getting infected with the virus. Even videos of many priests moving in Kedarnath and Badrinath temples shocked many to the core. The High Court showed contempt to such carelessness and stated, “In the video of Kedarnath and Badrinath temples, priests are not following social distancing. Even for worshipping, you cannot allow 23 priests to enter the temple, take the chopper and see what is happening in Badrinath-Kedarnath”. The Court also called the Uttarakhand government “negligent”. In fact, when medical workers conducted RT-PCR and Rapid Antigen Tests over the five-day period of Kumbh Mela, 1,701 came out positive for coronavirus (1).

A large gathering of people was also witnessed in Uttar Pradesh’s Badaun district where the funeral procession of religious leader Hazrat Abdul Mohammed Salimul Qadri took place.



Fig: This image is only for indicative purposes.

Photograph by Pooja Yadav

Thousands of his followers were found without a mask, flouting social distancing norms and other Covid-19 protocols prescribed by the state government while attending the event. There was a strict ‘Corona curfew’ in UP and yet this gathering took place with police failing to stop them. Moreover, many people gathered in Hyderabad for Eid shopping. Even though the state of Telangana was under a 10-day complete lockdown, hundreds of people thronged the markets near Hyderabad’s Charminar area. People were flouting Covid-19 protocols which led to 4,723 fresh COVID-19 cases, taking the tally to 5,11,711, while the toll rose to 2,834 with 31 more deaths.

(1): (2021, April 15). Over 1,700 Test Positive For COVID-19 in Kumbh Mela over 5-day Period. The Hindu.

Such negligence has led to disastrous consequences for many states in India. Madhya Pradesh has become one such state as it has experienced a rise in the number of coronavirus cases. Bhind, a city in Madhya Pradesh, alongside other 51 regions of the state is under severe lockdown because of the negligence of the people. People were seen attending a wedding at Bhind's Umri and were caught without masks. Law implementing authorities in this region made 35 guests returning from the wedding do frog jumps on the road for violating Covid-19 restrictions (2). Senior citizens and kids were also part of that group and they were all punished in such a manner by the police. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that these events throw light on the ways citizens and the government(s) together propelled the second wave of the pandemic in India. Today, India is on the brink of being devastated and lives of many people are at risk, while some have already lost their loved ones.



Fig: This image is only for indicative purposes.

Photograph by Upasna Mohapatra

(2): (2021, May 10). UP Police File FIR after Thousands Flout COVID Rules at Cleric's Funeral in Badaun. Times Now.



Photograph by *Laura Pedrotti*

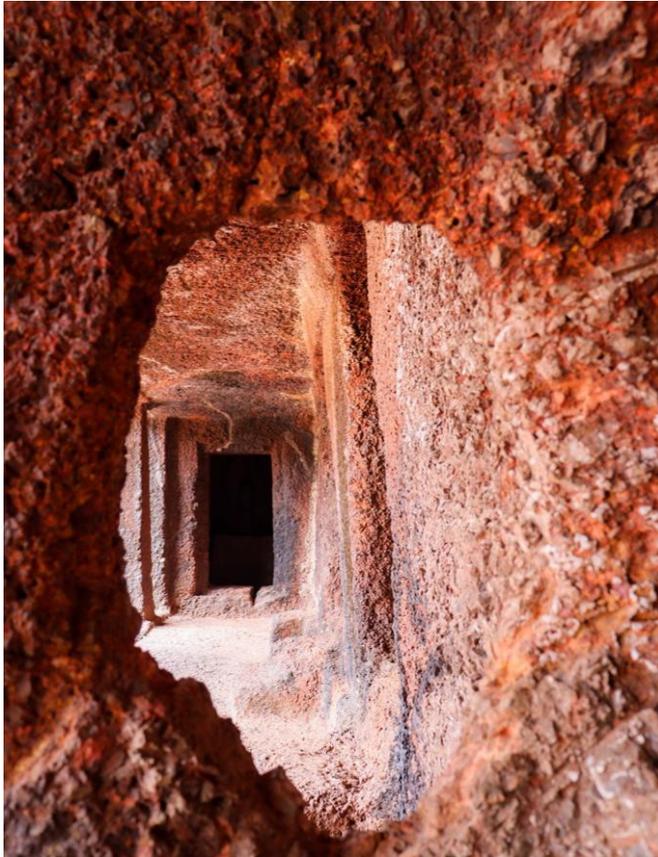
[A Reflection]

Mortals and Immortality

By Violina Das

Vol 2: Issue 02, The Loose Thread Magazine

“You know, it’s really very peculiar. To be mortal is the most basic human experience and yet man has never been able to accept it, grasp it, and behave accordingly. Man doesn’t know how to be mortal.” —Milan Kundera, *Immortality*



Photograph by *Gunjan Mitra*

Will it be a blessing or a curse if our deepest dream comes true and we become immortal? We despair death, but life without it could be much worse. Can eternity make us yearn to be mortal once more? Mortality could be so intertwined with life that if we stopped being mortal, we will no longer be human. Not just religious belief, but also metaphysical thinking, stems in large part from human beings' realization of their own mortality. Immortality refers to the eternal continuity of a person's life following death. The continuity of creation after death, whether indefinite or not, is referred to as the afterlife. Immortality means a never-ending

lifespan, whether or not the organism dies. Medical science has challenged conventional wisdom on what constitutes a "natural" human lifespan. Modern medical advancements have increased human life expectancy to the point that it is currently longer than it has ever been in modern history.

Hindus conclude that after death, an immortal soul is reincarnated. According to Hinduism, humans go through a cycle of life, death, and rebirth known as 'samsara'. If they live a good life, their karma increases, and their place in the next life rises; if they live a terrible life, their station falls. The soul is released from the loop and remains in eternal bliss after several lifetimes of perfecting its karma. In Hinduism, there is no position of everlasting punishment, but if a soul continually lives very evil lives, it may work its way to the very bottom of the cycle. The Upanishads contain straightforward renderings alluding to a biologically eternal existence brought on by purification and sublimation of the five elements that comprise the body.

Samsara is the fundamental principle of metempsychosis in Indian philosophy: the mind, finding itself awash in the "sea of samsara," seeks liberation (moksha) from the chains of its own past actions (karma), which are part of the general network of which samsara is constructed. Buddhism, which does not believe in the presence of a permanent spirit, recognizes the existence of a semi-permanent identity center that passes through the samsara phase. Samsara encompasses everything from insects (and sometimes plants and minerals) to the generative deity Brahma. The status of one's birth in the life hierarchy is determined by the consistency of one's previous life.

Samsara can also be understood as the denial of atman (true self) and pure truth (Brahman).

After understanding one's atman, one may achieve moksha (liberation). Moksha is regarded as the greatest accomplishment that any being can attain, and it eventually leads to the end of samsara. Samsara is often associated with or regarded as earthly life. It is the ever-changing condition on a never-ending wheel, which contradicts the realization of atman, moksha, or pure truth, which are everlasting and infallible.

Samsara's precise sources remain uncertain. Scholars have several hypotheses regarding the origins of the doctrine of regeneration in Asian rituals and ancient Indian cultures. The definition is not found in the Rigveda, but it is found in the Upanishads. There is a Vedic concept of re-death (punar-mrityu) in heaven, which is thought to be a reference to the concept of rebirth in the earthly realm. However, these are all theories; there is little historical evidence as to how and when the idea of samsara originated. What is known is that by the time of early Buddhism and Jainism, the idea of samsara was common and that samsara expanded to include different views and beliefs from the Hindu faith within each tradition, especially within Jainism and Buddhism.

The Hindu view of life within samsara as a cycle of rebirth and re-death was present in ancient Hindu rituals before samsara was called, and both are inextricably linked with terror. The Jiva is immortal, but its bodies must continually die and are reborn into lives fraught with the challenge of terror or starvation, as well as the agony of grief and hardships such as old age or illness, in an almost infinite cycle. The body and senses bind the mind to samsara before it realizes itself. Samsara is seen as an infinite cycle that has no beginning or end, and while moksha is seen as salvation from the eternal wheel, there are those who acknowledge their place within the cyclical samsara. Despite the fact that Samsara is seen as a painful, repetitive

operation, there are many who wish to obtain the Vargas without attaining moksha. There are many devotees of Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism who practice a "samsaric" type of worship or faith. In this situation, believers live a more pious and generous existence, hoping not to end samsara but to guarantee a better birth in their next life after this one.

According to bioethicist Leon Kass, there are significant virtues that result from our mortality. Could life be serious or important in the absence of death? Isn't the idea that we just have so much time the reason we should take it seriously and love it so much? What if the most important thing to us is inextricably linked to our mortality and frailty? How could we be courageous, honourable, or any of the other qualities that entail challenge and the fear of death if we were immortal? The Homeric gods, who are eternally young and pretty, lead vain and wasteful lives. Epicurus contended that "a correct belief that death means nothing to us makes the mortality of life fun, not because it brings an endless amount of time to it, but because it removes the craving for immortality." What would we do if we had a longer or even eternal life? We could have several jobs, multiple partners, and grow more interests; in short, we could do more of anything. More time, though, is not the same as infinite time. Is there anything that we might see doing permanently, not just for a long time? Will we lose faith in life if we lived indefinitely?



Photograph by *Laura Pedrotti*



Photograph by Yogesh Painkra

[An Article]

Black Marketing and Hoarding During Pandemic

By Ekta Goyal

Vol 2: Issue 02, The Loose Thread Magazine

Interestingly, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic induced fear in the minds of people. When the government announced a lockdown in 2020, people hoarded food products at their homes out of panic. They were fearful that they may not die from the virus but may definitely die from starvation. A similar case comes to one's notice in 2021, when the second wave of the pandemic hit India.

This time, the hoarding as well as black marketing of medical supplies took place. Medicines such as Remdesivir, which were considered effective in the early recovery of coronavirus-infected patients, began to be black marketed by people all across India (1). Cases of black marketing of oxygen cylinders and concentrators also made headlines in the media (2).

Moreover, when the second wave hit India, many doctors argued that the rate of transmission of the virus has increased manifold and the symptoms have become worse. The lack of any COVID-specific medicine which could actually prove efficacious, further created panic among people. Vaccination drive also came with certain myths and ideas of unreliability and a lack of clinical efficacy, especially when a large number of vaccine manufacturers entered the market. All this eventually forced people to hoard medical supplies as a ray of hope in times of emergency.

However, as is evident, such an unhealthy and unprogressive mindset brought devastating consequences. Hoarding of such pharmaceutical supplies created a shortage of COVID-related medicines in the market, widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots. While on the one side, some people had so many supplies even when they did not require them, some others (the needy) suffered because of their lack.

To worsen the situation, black marketing began to be practiced by people which significantly increased (doubled or even tripled) the prices of steroidal medicines and equipment for oxygen support. In times where one desired a helping hand, a shameful "business" prospered.

Even the items required to perform funeral rites (such as wood) began to be black marketed. To this, the Delhi High Court bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said, "We are still not understanding the gravity of the situation and that is why we are not coming together. Which is why we are seeing instances of hoarding and black marketing. Our moral fabric has been dismembered to a great extent" (3).

Navneet Kalra, one of the biggest black marketers was arrested by Delhi Police on 17th May, 2021 and was held in court for trial. He is alleged to have black marketed and hoarded 524 oxygen concentrators which were imported from China at approximately 20,000 INR but were sold at glaring prices of Rs. 50,000 – Rs. 70,000 (4).

The Prevention of Black Marketing & Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980 allows the government to detain those who are controlling the production, supply or distribution of any "essential commodity". Although it does not deal directly with black marketing, it prescribes penalty for violation of this law.

Recent news has exposed yet another set of cases of black marketing. But this time, Remdesivir moved out of the picture and a new drug called Amphotericin B, a drug used to treat black fungus, made entry into the market. Cases in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Pune, and in many other regions made the headlines as the government

(1): (2021, May 7). *Two Arrested for Black Marketing of Remdesivir*. The Hindu.

(2): (2021, May 9). *Covid-19: 3 Arrested in Delhi for Black-Marketing of Oxygen Concentrators*. Business Standard.

(3): (2021, May 6). *Moral Fabric Dismembered: HC on Hoarding, Black Marketing Amid Covid-19 Surge*. Hindustan Times.

(4): (2021, May 29). *Navneet Kalra Committed White-Collar Crime: Delhi Police to Court in Oxygen Concentration Black Marketing Case*. The Economics Times.

declared “Mucormycosis” or black fungus as a notified disease. In a recent notice issued by the government, black fungus was declared an "epidemic" in India which shifted the focus from coronavirus to mucormycosis, giving one more opportunity to the black marketers to initiate another business. Several persons have been arrested in these regions for selling this drug at high prices. In Pune, for instance, five people were arrested for engaging in this offence. They were selling Amphotericin B injection for 21,000/- and Bevacizumab injection for 65,000/-.



Since the pandemic isn't over right now, such cases are bound to emerge again. Therefore, the Delhi High Court has set up fast track courts to deal exclusively with these cases. The constitution defines such offences as cognizable and non-bailable. Stricter punishments are also mentioned for the offences. Government is also trying to make sure that the country doesn't lack infrastructure. Proper beds and ventilators are being provided to accommodate people all over the country.

Is it really the administration's fault or we humans are losing our humanity? Administration is trying its best to take care of such cases and is finding a remedy for them, but greed of human beings is taking precedence. At a time when people are fighting for their lives, one should take proper steps in helping the needy and in stopping the spread of the virus rather than being greedy and irrational.



[An Article]

The Vaccine War Within and Outside India

By Saumya Sen

The shortage of vaccines which India is currently facing, which was once a pioneer in vaccine production, is not a month's mistake but a decade's blunder. It was before one and a half decade ago when a huge democratic nation whose one of the strengths for over a century has been vaccine development and production, destroyed its self-sufficiency in it. It was under the UPA-I government when Anbumani Ramadoss, the then Union Health Minister in Dr. Manmohan Singh's government, effectively shifted vaccine production and government procurement to the private sector. The ministry responsible for funding and facilitating GMP compliance of PSUs instead suspended them for non-compliance.

(1) In 2008, the licenses of 3 big vaccine PSUs got suspended altogether, citing their non-compliance with WHO good manufacturing practices (GMP). This propelled government dependence on the private vaccine manufacturers. This happened despite SP Shukla's PIL to the Supreme Court and his warning that doing away with the PSU's vaccine-making authority would compromise India's health security and that the government must preserve its power in vaccine manufacturing.

However, the agency was eventually handed over to the private players, which brings us to the juncture today, where the central and the state governments are being ruled by the vaccine manufacturers. Indeed, currently 80% of the Indian government's need for vaccines is met by private firms and foreign countries (2). In addition to the destroyed vaccine self-sufficiency, there are a number of current reasons for the tragic shortage of vaccines in a nation which was the biggest exporter of the same before the current pandemic.

One of the most prominent reasons is the

mismanagement by the government who allowed millions of doses to be exported to the world at a time when the second wave was on our doorstep. Some of the experts also believe that opening vaccination drive from the age group 18-44 coupled with resuming the same for the 45+ population, without being mindful of supplies, proved immunization difficult. And at a time when India needs about 200-250 million doses a month to fight from the deadly virus, it has only managed to secure about 70-80 million doses a month. The data provided by the government reflects that only 30 million people have been able to get two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in India so far which amounts to only 2% of India's total population.

In order to keep up with the increasing pace of registrations done by the new age group for getting vaccinated, vaccine makers had to produce more vaccines. The Centre directed the private hospitals as well as the state governments to procure vaccines directly from the private suppliers at the rates decided by them. Moreover, it didn't set any cap on them up till a later date. Reports state that each state asked for about 10-15 million doses.

The statement by the Serum Institute of India which produces Covishield vaccine clearly shows the gravity of the issue, "It is challenging to meet independently the requirement from a large number of private hospitals, given our current obligation to meet the government's existing requirements and to meet additional demand emanating from the states" (3). At a time when the local population was struggling with the spike in COVID cases, a vaccine war was going on between vaccine makers and the government. The question here is who is to be blamed for the shortcomings in vaccine supplies?

(1): (2016, November 18). *Closure of Vaccine Units Not Justified: Parliamentary Panel*. The Hindu

(2): (2021, April 17). *COVID-19 Vaccines: Waiting for Advantage India*. DownToEarth.

(3): M, Kaunain. (2021, April 29). *Serum Cuts Rates for States: Signals Delays in Delivery*. The Indian Express.

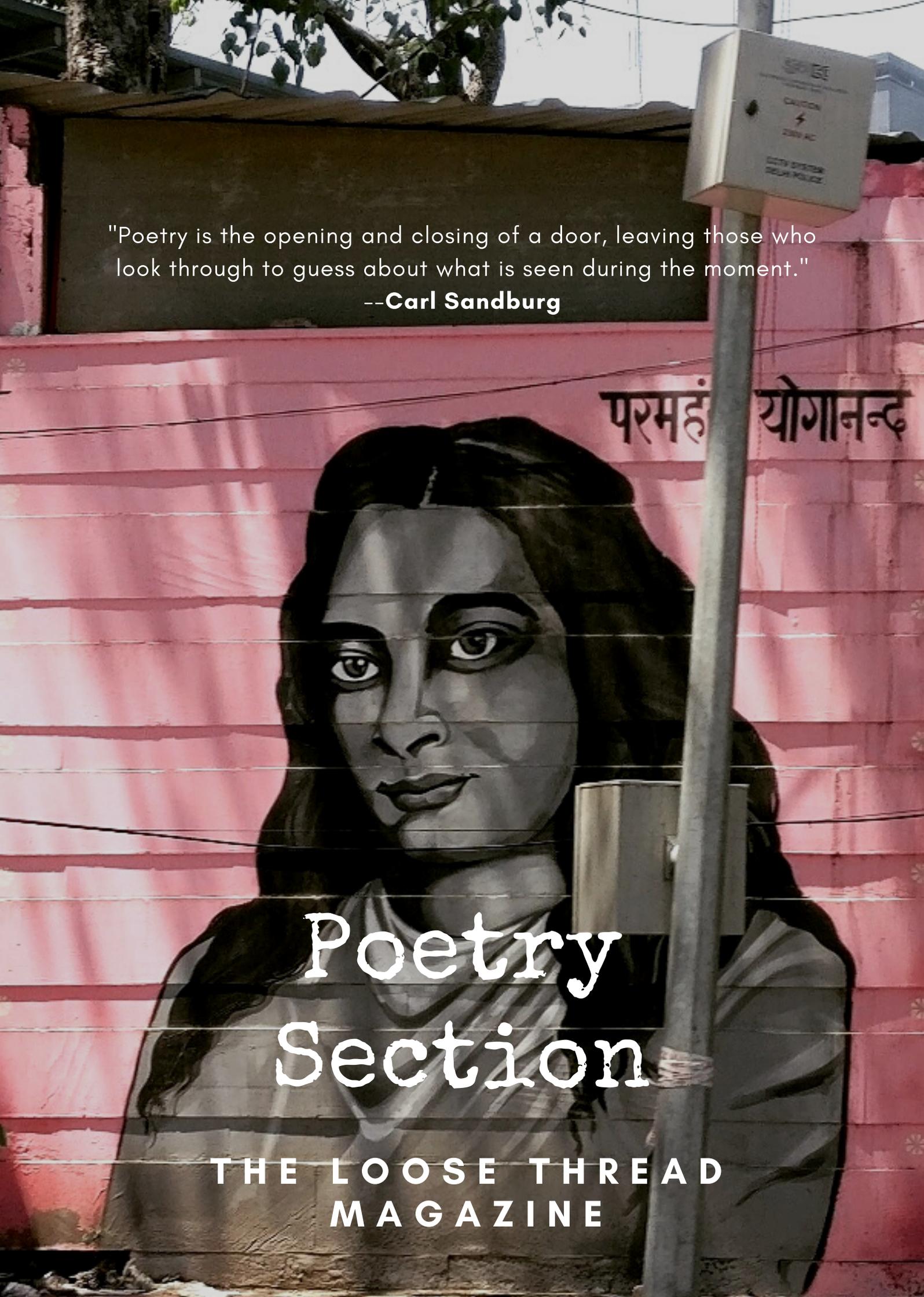


India is totally dependent on two Indian private companies for Covid vaccine production – Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech. These companies received a lot of criticism for their different vaccine price structures for doses destined for the central government, state governments and private hospitals. The prices for vaccines spiked, and at a time when people were losing lives, these private players monopolized vaccine production in India. However, SII's CEO Adar Poonawalla later, after much criticism, reduced these prices for the state governments from Rs. 400 to Rs. 300 per dose which could save thousands of crores of state funds going forward and could enable more vaccinations (4). Moreover, Adar Poonawalla too placed the blame on the government arguing that the institute had not boosted the capacity earlier because there were no orders and they did not think they needed to make more than 1 billion doses a year. The paramount question here arises, why weren't the orders for vaccines given on time even when the finance minister declared on the eve of the annual budget declaration on 1st February 2021 that a total of Rs.35,000 crore would be provided for just carrying out vaccination.

Undeniably, the Indian government is not ready to accept any media allegations and insists that it is continuously ordering more vaccines to meet the growing demand. Due to shortage within the country, the government has even banned exports to other countries, which is provoking a vaccine war in the international setup. Banning export of vaccines is greatly affecting countries like Africa which is heavily dependent on India's vaccines. The stated target of Africa was not met as it primarily relied on supplies from the global COVAX vaccine-sharing facility, which was heavily dependent on AstraZeneca shots produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII). A senior advisor to Ethiopia's Health Ministry, Muluken Yohannes told Reuters, "We were expecting some delays but not to this scale. As a country we must search for other options" (5). Recently, after much deliberations, the central government has announced that it will take control over 25% of vaccines that were earlier held by the states and that, the Centre will buy 75% of the vaccines and will provide them free of cost to the states. Having said that, many from different nations of the globe argue that although it is important for India to procure vaccine supplies for its citizens and therefore, the ban on exports is reasonable, still such a ban may prolong the pandemic in the long run as citizens across other countries will not be vaccinated. However, it is India's responsibility to look after its citizens first when countries like Africa have the option to import vaccines from other regions such as the US, Israel, China and many others which have declared themselves Covid-free. Such developed Covid free nations should come forward to help the developing Covid-hit nations. And in this way, we could take a few steps to stop the fight for vaccines within and outside India.

(4): Thaker, Teena. (2021, April 28). *Covishield Prices for States Slashed from Rs. 400 to Rs. 300 per Dose: Adar Poonawalla*. *The Economic Times*.

(5): (2021, May 18). *India's Halt to Vaccine Exports Very Problematic for Africa*. *The Economic Times*.

A photograph of a woman's face painted on a wall. The woman has long dark hair and is looking slightly to the right. The background is a pinkish-red wall with a banner that reads "परमहंस योगानन्द" in Hindi. A utility box is visible on the right side of the wall. The text "Poetry Section" and "THE LOOSE THREAD MAGAZINE" is overlaid on the image.

"Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during the moment."

--Carl Sandburg

Poetry Section

THE LOOSE THREAD
MAGAZINE

The Loose Thread Magazine presents...

**T H E F U T U R E O F
I N D I A**

By Dewang Mishra



When the figurehead came upon the stage
Wiping the tears of millions
With his saline words,
Opening up the prospectus of a
Bigger
Better
Invincible
Future,
To hide the
Fragile
Fallible
Malleable
Present
In his bulletproof voice,
Someone shouted from the crowd
Hail the almighty—
Writing his name on another wooden slab
That would turn him into a statue
Dripping of myths
Which men of wisdom used to recite
To hold a moral high ground.
We the people of a Republic
That has already raised its arms high
Up in surrender,
Sat with a few people less
On our dinner tables
That creaked with refusal,
Because it wasn't our fault
If no one heard this need—
It wasn't a war cry, I know.
Masked face
Hidden under a pillow
Scared that we are failing,
That they've started coloring the disease
Black, white and yellow
Like it's a litmus test
Of how to measure one's fear.
More responsibilities on weak shoulders
So many eyes,



Yet I'm not alone in this,
Just that I feel lonely
With whatever I'm feeling-
Like everyone else.

How the figurehead in today's talk of heart
Said we have overcome a monster,
But he isn't telling the cost
Because it's not a war,
We aren't soldiers
Not worthy of a numerical count-
Not enough.
In grief
I say hello,
To a new Nation
Divided
United
Cleaned up
Like a slate,
Unwritten
Or just removed.

The figurehead states
How far we came,
But someone ask him
How to measure loss
If distance is insurmountable?
How to handle something with care
If it's already broken?

The golden age of our country
Has arrived just in time,
Someone jinxed it.
Revived like a phoenix
But butchered like a chicken
Which has its wings on fire,
Wailing in nostalgia-
Unable or disabled?



A kaleidoscopic vision
About right and wrong
Only to be seen
Gawking at oneself.
Hands sanitized
Inside crematoriums,
But what about the filth
Of this soul
Filled with raging voices
Asking answers
Only to find consolations
In numbers that are uncountable,
Saved before help arrived,
Saved!
Saved!
Saved!
Like it's heroic
To do what you've been chosen for,
A present that's scripted
Only now we realized our roles.

Few steps away from a miracle
But we are here now,
Almost 80 years of independence
A future we've just defined
Only to remind us of our chains
And a tryst with destiny
That almost killed us at midnight.

The figurehead,
Said he's sorry for my loss
Yet his fingers don't say the same,
A message buzzed on my screen
That everyone has suffered
So my suffering won't count—
His tears shed on the ground
They feel like acid rain
Falling on white sheets of history.



We are a future
We are witness
We are spectators
We are,
Not enough
Engraved on Temples and Mosques
But after all the forgetting
We realized the real gods are at the hospitals
Treating us,
For a sickness
We are fed for years.

I'm writing about a future
In past tense,
Because it has happened so many times.
So instead of apologizing
We the people of a broken Republic,
Held a bandage
To put something on this splitting ache,
But everyone has slept
Taking some painkillers
Hoping the numbness
Holds a solution,
As the figurehead
Walks off the stage
With another victory-
Over us.

The Loose Thread Magazine presents...

**Y I N
A N D Y A N G**

By Kiran Goswami



And when you die,
I know I will pray for you to not attain liberation.
Because if you do,
How will I find you in every body that passes by me?
Who will I wait for?
As they do in the movies we watched together.

If yin and yang die
And yin is born as yang
And yang as yin
Did they even exist in the first place?

Mom tells me you are born again and again
Until you reach enlightenment
Until you attain liberation
Like a bird whose feathers fall down
But her wings do not.
So, she flies -
Naked
Because there is no one to watch her,
But only she.

If that is really true,
Then when you die, I will pray for you to not attain liberation,
Because ask those who are left behind,
How praying for magicians,
In this world of pathogens and viruses feels like.

I heard the Goblin's bride say
Humans have 4 lives
One of planting the seed
Another of watering it,
One of harvesting the seed
And another of cherishing the harvest.

If that is true, then I will
Become the Sun
Who breathes away all your water



So that you continue to water your life
and not move ahead.
If that is true,
Then when you die,
I will pray for you to not attain liberation
Because ask those who are left behind,
How some pictures become stories,
And some stories become pictures.

Dad tells me, human body is a flower
Waiting to wither away,
And become a part of the soil,
That goes into the sea
Which Shiva churns.

But if that is true
Then I will become
The wind that carries your pollens with me.
And I will pray for you to not attain liberation.
Because if yang attains liberation
The world loses its balance
And succumbs to nothing.

So I will wait for you
As they do in the movies we watched together,
And I will search for you
In every body that passes by.
Because when you die
I know I will pray for
You to not attain liberation.

The Loose Thread Magazine presents...

**A M E M O I R O F
D I S E A S E D I N D I A**

By Rupa Dangwal



Lost vision, swelling under the eyes
Ears impaired and a loose smile.
Some old, some new
Diseases, symptoms and sick heads arise.
Sinus, fever, pink eyes
With chest pain and dislocated jawlines.
The excruciating crisis and surging deaths
Make me think and look back
To what failed, to what caused the deterioration of health.
Insufficient medical supplies!
Wrecking Covid guidelines!
Black marketing and hoarding cries!
Looting our own allies!

And when we took a break...
I have confession to make –
Like an albatross around my neck
This sin weighs me down
And gnaws at my heart.
Therefore, I need to talk about it
And here I start.

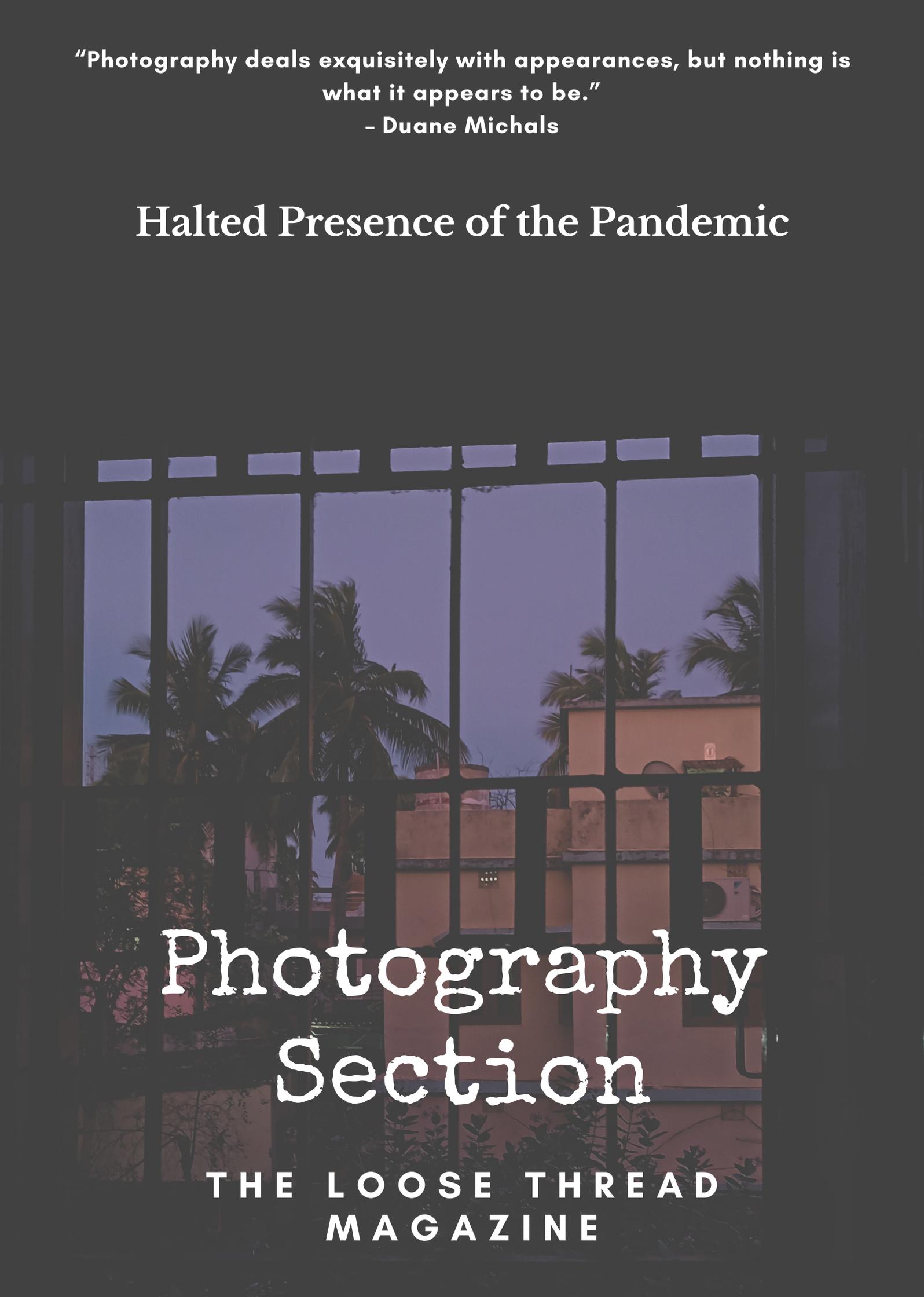
Occasionally, I have been visiting religious sites
Only to cough once, twice and thrice
While attending political rallies and rites
I encounter many humorous delights –
Some unnecessary verbal fights
For space, while there is no concrete respite
Flouting the rules, singing cacophonous cries.
Utter negligence on the part of the crowd.
What a pitiful sight!

In a grocery store,
I feel a slight temptation
Of living free, without any limitations.
So, I do unmask my chin
For the time nobody watches me,
But oh! What do I see?
Peril, Peril and an India that is struggling to be set free.

**"Photography deals exquisitely with appearances, but nothing is
what it appears to be."**

- Duane Michals

Halted Presence of the Pandemic



Photography Section

**THE LOOSE THREAD
MAGAZINE**

Artwork by *Upasna Mohapatra*



From the Inside...

Isolation

The pandemic has isolated each one of us; the body doesn't recognize the mind, the mind doesn't rationalize. Inside the closed doors of our house, a new routine has been formed, one that is devoid of energy, excitement, rigor and happiness.



Artwork by Pooja Yadav

From the streets of India...

Street Vendor

Just as the chirping of the birds woke us up, the cries of the vendors marked another day. The morning started with a newspaper hawker coming by to drop the newspapers, while tea was already on the pot, boiling. The afternoon saw a vegetable vendor coming in, dressed up in hope for another day of business.



Artwork by *Laura Pedrotti*

Faith



A halt on the religious gatherings didn't allow faith to be shaken. When the outside was prohibited, religion sneaked inside.



Artwork by Yogesh Painkra

Navigating through Traffic

Navigating through the traffic was once the hardest part. The anxiety of witnessing three-wheelers, two-wheelers, cars and trucks on one single road, the constant honking, the brawls over 'who goes first' were part of the daily hassle. But today, Covid-19 has taught us that something can be harder and more challenging than that.

Artwork by *Gunjan Mitra*

Going Places



One thing that has changed significantly due to the current pandemic is the freedom and liberty to travel. Even when the travel restrictions are easing, the ghost of the pandemic comes back to life, reminding us of the lives he had taken away.

Personal Stories of the Pandemic

Our Team

Wilson
in back ground
13,
ish you had
es.



POST CARD.

THIS SIDE FOR CORRESPONDENCE.

Dec. 31st 1915

Dear friend I reached home safe but I am feeling very lonely & miss you so much look for letter soon pleasant dreams be yours M.A.

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

RECEIVED
JAN 1 1916
H. R. U. A.

R.H. 130
Blanche

CARTE

Correspondance

HUNARDEEP KAUR

On the one hand, the pandemic has made me want to reconcile with my own self and existence in an uncertain world. But on the other hand, it has made me resolute to never reconcile with the way the society and the politics predominantly function. Pandemic has been about rage and grief, about desperation and insecurity, about loss and reconciliation and yet, it has taught me to cling more tightly onto love and hope, and rage and revolution.

KHUSHI AGRAWAL

The impact of Covid-19 on me was disastrous as I didn't get to see the college campus for which I was eagerly waiting. Witnessing individuals die even after the expectation that vaccines can save them was something that I was unable to come to terms with. Nevertheless, the lockdown provided me the family time which I could have never received. The stories narrated by my parents make me glad that before moving away from them, I at least turned out to be more attached to them.

APARNA SINGH

This pandemic has been surreal for me; my life has changed so drastically and yet, if I introspect in silence, nothing of much significance actually happened. I experienced the most bizarre year through social media and it feels as if the world has shifted so drastically that I do not know whether I have gained something amidst all this, or lost. Between the uncertainty of the new normal and a looming loss of the normal, I struggle to find where I belong. Nevertheless, I feel more confident now and have accepted more of myself. This pandemic has been a wide ride and there doesn't seem to be an exit.

VIOLINA DAS

I tried to condense the pandemic that infiltrated our young lives and wrecked destruction in its wake into a single phrase. Through the eyes of the youth, I wonder what it would take to witness the planet break apart in front of us with the mankind struggling to fight back against this unfathomable menace. And at a very early and critical juncture in our lives, we are witnessing a worldwide crisis affecting not just health, but also many elements of our society. Undeniably, the scope of its negative consequences may be too intricate and convoluted for us to comprehend.

ROSHINI SRIVASTAVA

The past year has been a slow blur that somehow went by in a flash. At some point, even on quiet nights, it felt as if everything was slowly collapsing around me while all I could do was sit back and wait. I would be going on with my day and suddenly I would stop; an overwhelming feeling would claw up my chest and I would find myself crying because it's so lonely and so painful to be helpless and isolated but my inner voice will keep on scolding me for falling apart while worse things are happening. Eventually, it would all coalesce into a fuzzy static in my brain with just one thought: *I need somebody.*

Correspondance

MEGHNA YADAV

The second wave of the pandemic has created havoc in all our lives, much greater than any of us could have fathomed. It has been really draining – both physically and emotionally. I am still struggling to cope with the loss of family members. All calls and messages from peers and family carry some bad news. Constant feelings of hopelessness and pessimism burden me and as desperately as I crave normalcy, the question that always lingers in my head is, would life really be normal ever again?

DEWANG MISHRA

Being a 2021 graduate wouldn't have hurt in normal circumstances but last year's optimism about normality in life hit like a speeding car on a highway. Giving justifications for grief, loss and for every new normal that didn't feel like one, I've spent my days praying, and counting days spent waiting like a monotonous poem written, but still unread. Just grateful to exist, with hope of being read again someday soon.

RUPA DANGWAL

I thought I had braced myself to go through the pandemic. Then, I realized that the longest I can drag myself is a year and half but not forever. When the initial adrenaline thrill of lockdown died, I found myself overwhelmed with a virtual way of connecting with people, something that felt strange and a bit cold. I was constantly pushing myself to be productive to cope up with despondency and fear of losing my loved ones. This whole ordeal made me realize how important it is to loosen up and relax to fight the adversity ahead.

UPASNA MOHAPATRA

Having a proper roof above our head with 3 meals a day is a privilege. Death is such a tranquil moment. It's very personal to each and every person. But this pandemic changed the very essence of it. The media's attempt to showcase 'The Burning Cemetery' for TRP was insensitive as it didn't amplify any leads for Covid resources but broadcasted the crazy elections. The whole India was suffocating and yet, the government and the media turned such blind eye to the needy. COVID seeks no religion, no caste, no bureaucracy. India clearly needs help and the government is so delusional that it can't even see anything clearly.

EKTA GOYAL

Amidst all the negative energies and the coronavirus cases, being with my family – safe, was enough to make me content. But as time passed, coping got difficult. Frustrated brains, unsatisfied minds and depressed me was living a life with no goals and ambitions. To kill time and to distract myself from the harsh outer world, I started binge watching. I also found myself retrospectively and analyzing, re-analyzing and rethinking my own decisions and actions. Today, I realize the importance of being patient and hopeful in life. Eventually, it's you who matters, who will be there for you.



KIRAN GOSWAMI

The pandemic incited and extinguished too many emotions in me, from worthlessness to vengeance. It charted out a rainbow of emotions everyday inside me – a rainbow that was all grey. I felt as if I could no longer see colours. Everything I was and everything I had, trembled and wavered – my hope, dreams, feelings, emotions and me. But one thing that did not waver was my faith. I do not know if that faith is something I have in the divine force or in this world but it was this faith that became my gravity when I felt like an apple floating in a void.

GUNJAN MITRA

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly been one of the hardest times of my life. As I wake up every morning and each day stretches out into an endless repetitive loop, I cannot help but feel the burden of all the time lost – time I was to spend enjoying what was supposed to be the best years of my life. Yet, amidst the pandemic that has taken so many lives and ravaged so many homes, I can only feel grateful to know that my loved ones are safe. I can only hope that my vision of a happier tomorrow comes true.

POOJA YADAV

The day when the notice about suspension of online classes came out, I was really happy. I was also wondering why online classes need to be cancelled during the pandemic, but it was only later that I realized many classes who were tested Covid-positive were actually indisposed and some were even critical. At this moment, I understood how they too need rest and that, I was lucky to be with my family – safe and healthy. I believe that a person suffering from Covid-19 must be kept in a positive and happy environment as through positivity, we can all come out of the pandemic.

SAUMYA SEN

During the first wave of Covid-19, our minds were not prepared to acknowledge the deadly coronavirus and the phase elapsed silently, sometimes by even providing us with happy leisure time to spend with our families. Contrary to it, the same virus mutated itself in such drastic ways during the second wave. This phase hit us hard even when we became somewhat familiar with it. Sadly, it left millions to mourn for the loss of their loved ones and to beg for oxygen support. There wasn't a single day when I didn't hear about someone dying. All I could do at that time was pray to the Almighty to prevent more lives from dying. In spite of all the trauma, I wish to be optimistic in order to pass this toughest exam of life patiently, knowing that the impact this disease is leaving in our lives is hard to forget.

LAURA PEDROTTI

With the arrival of the pandemic, I realize that many issues have intensified not only for me, but for everyone who, in a way, before the pandemic, were too busy to notice situations that were bothering them. An exhausting job, a poorly cultivated family relationship, more time at home, the danger on the streets – everything became more intense and began to cross the subjectivity of each individual. With the arrival of the pandemic, I realized how important relationships are, I realized that the things we took for granted are actually a gift and a privilege, I realized that a disease can bring citizens closer or farther apart in the same proportion.

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We thank our team of individuals who have worked relentlessly to make this Issue possible.

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Voice of the Founders:

"Every day has been harrowing. We have experimented with different forms to make this issue creative and successful. We hope our readers get insights into the challenges faced by India in the second wave of COVID-19."

-Riya Mohan

-Mohammad Shamim

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