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Editorial

COVID must not distract from SDGs

Global extreme poverty is expected to rise in 2020 for the first time in over 20 yearsÿ ., according to a World Bank report. This is yet another measure of the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on global human well-being. The report said that the Pandemic could push an additional 88 to 115 million of the world population into extreme poverty, defined as living on less than US$ 1.9 a day. It is apparent that there is a roll-back in the progress made during the last few decades in lifting millions out of poverty. While many have slipped back into extreme poverty, large numbers of new poor have been added. This has reportedly happened in large measure among middle income countries. As per the report, 8 out on 10 *'new poor' will be in middle income countries.*

These are outcomes of the pandemic which are already visible and have been felt and measured. Yet there are many adverse outcomes lurking beneath the surface. One such impact is on education. Sadly, education has been very badly affected and has hurt the poor especially hard. The poor in rural areas have been greatly hurt. Schools and colleges have shifted to online teaching modes for more than a year now, leaving the less advantaged behind. Constrained by lack of access and non-affordability of devices and connectivity, the vast majority of children have been left without learning inputs. While this setback would be temporary with likely resumption of classroom learning soon, the lost time and opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills cannot be compensated. Further, any fresh occurrence of new variants of the virus or further 'waves' could damage the situation irretrievably.

Among other setbacks could be on the climate action front. While hard numbers are yet to come by, it is likely that there has been a deceleration in climate action. Before the onset of the Pandemic, climate action was at the forefront of the

global conversation and right on top of the agenda; everything changed with the onset and progress of COVID-19. Saving lives, and later, restoring economic growth have been the priorities. So, in a way, it is a double whammy; while the pandemic has snatched livelihoods and deepened poverty, unaddressed climate change issues will put in jeopardy air quality, food and water security, and shelter. This could have disastrous long term consequences, especially for the poor and vulnerable. In India though, the progress has been commendable. India's renewable energy (solar and wind) capacity is about 98000 MW, within striking distance of the 100 GW mark. Including large hydro, the total non-fossil fuel based capacity is about 1,45,000 MW or about 37 % of the total energy capacity. India's commitment under the Paris Agreement is to have a Renewable Energy share of 40% in the energy mix by 2030. We will surely reach there much before.

The world must emerge from the deep impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in new ways to ensure that we remain aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. There is collective need for innovation in use of capital and labour to drive economic growth in a way that is fair, just, and equitable. Of particular focus must be the access to technology. We have seen how the Pandemic, in some ways, could exacerbate the digital divide and deprive millions. Currently when the nation is making rapid strides in delivery of services through digital means, every citizen must be able to access the means necessary to participate in this digital revolution. Digital tools can greatly enhance the effectiveness of public health initiatives as we are seeing in India's ongoing national vaccination programme. There is need for stepping up investments in public healthcare, especially in human resources and technology so that the system can respond effectively to challenges like COVID-19. The response in the case of the current vaccination programmes has been praiseworthy, giving us renewed confidence in the ability of the public healthcare system. Education at all levels must be insulated and made resilient to such shocks. It is a precious input for our children giving them the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to face the competitive world of the future with confidence and thereby secure their livelihoods.

AIILSG, as part of its COVID relief and resilience building initiatives, has also been working in the area of under-privileged children's education. Its Community-embedded Shikshan Ranjan Kendras (CSRKs) have proved to be the only source for continued education for the under-privileged children. The model is whereby a local CSRK, mentored by a well-trained Shikshan Mitra delivers

continued education of the children in various responsive and responsible forms such as Learning-at-Doorsteps, or in small batches of 5 or less, and 'mobile library' to read books. While observing all COVID-19 lockdown norms, continued education including counselling of children and their parents through learning at doorsteps approach is ensured. This approach is being used to address needs of the children belonging to the most marginalised sections including indigenous tribal populations, and those from Denotified & Nomadic Tribes with special focus on girls & differently-abled children. Aspects such as safety and mental well-being of children, safe water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and COVID-19 appropriate-behaviour are covered.

As the world engages in the task to beef up public healthcare, support businesses, and bolster economic growth, the focus must be on a just and equitable recovery with the Sustainable Development Goals firmly in focus.

Political Empowerment of Women and the Marginalised in India: the conduit of Decentralisation

Nayanatara S.Nayak, Narayan Billava

Abstract

Political empowerment facilitated through decentralization process in India enables participation of all segments of society including women and the marginalized in local governance. Decentralisation process in India is backed up by affirmative action that provides constitutional rights for every section of the society to represent the people. Such kind of decentralisation acts as a catalyst in nurturing the social capital thus boosting the confidence of the marginalized. Over and above the region specific Acts enacted by state governments, the 73rd Amendment to Constitution brought in 1992 is a major strengthening pillar to decentralised process, which indicated the need for uplifting rural women socially, economically and politically and the weaker sections by making them part of administration and development. This paper presents a thematic review of literature in the context of political participation of women and the marginalized. Earlier studies on rural administration largely indicate the influence of elite and upper caste in politics, which used power for protecting their self interests and that of their community denying decision making power to the downtrodden and common man. However, the traces of transition are seen across the country with many women taking the lead and taking the benefit of affirmative action set in by the Constitution of India and state governments. The literature suggests that local government can have some significance only if they are responsive, transparent, participatory and accountable to the people, particularly Dalits, tribals and women. Currently, the provision of inclusion for marginalised groups even though enhanced their participation in the decision making process at the local level, is inadequate for their empowerment. A large number of studies have highlighted the lack of training and awareness among women

representatives about the structure of PRIs, resources, responsibilities as one of the impending factors in participation and involvement of women in panchayat activities and suggest continued programmes on capacity building. Reservations for women and scheduled castes/ scheduled tribes (SCs/STs) appear prima-facie to be working well. Although there is long way to go, the researchers feel that reservation for women and the marginalised has opened the door to revolutionary changes of a political, social and cultural nature by empowering more than one million women and large number of Dalits through free and fair elections at village, block and district levels in rural India.

Key words: *Decentraisation; Empowerment; Women; Marginalised*

1. Introduction

Political empowerment facilitated through decentralization process in India enables participation of all segments of society including women and the marginalized in governance. Decentralisation process in India is backed up by affirmative action that provides constitutional rights for every section of the society to represent the people. Such kind of decentralisation acts as a catalyst in nurturing the social capital thus boosting the confidence of the marginalized. The space created or reserved for them compels them to participate in governance and administration. This further motivates others to follow and the impact is likely to trickle down in the course of time. Over and above the region specific acts enacted by state governments, the 73rd Amendment to Constitution brought in 1992 is a major strengthening pillar to decentralised process, which indicated the need for uplifting rural women socially, economically and politically and the weaker sections by making them part of administration and development. The literature refers to political participation rates as indicators of governmental legitimacy, citizens' support for a democratic form of government, the sense of collective responsibility and civic duty, which are associated with stable democracies Desposato and Norrander (2005).

Local government can have some significance only if they are responsive, transparent, participatory and accountable to the people, particularly Dalits, tribals, women and the fisher folk (Oommen 2004). Without statutory provision for decentralisation, women and the socially excluded may face socio-political and cultural denial and rejection due to instability/insecurity and conflict of interests (Singh 2009) among men and the privileged. Mohanty (2009) from his study of three panchayats in Orissa generalises that

although the provision of inclusion for marginalised groups has enhanced their participation in the decision making process at the local level, it is inadequate for their empowerment. His study reveals that the dominant castes had co-opted loyal and faithful members from the reserved category and enjoyed major share in grama panchayat (GP) budget, while women from reserved category remained faithful to their party than their castes and class. This phenomenon has been identified by Jairath and Sajja (2009) also from their study on three selected GPs in Telangana district of Andhra Pradesh. According to their study "Inclusion of excluded committees does not take place automatically through passage of bills in the legislature, giving them rights and power, it depends on factors such as social discrimination, economic dependence, control over means of violence, access to information and the nature of social movements to mobilize the excluded committees and groups". Chakraborthy and Bhattacharya (1993) conclude from their study on party politics in panchayat system in West Bengal that "PRI will prove to be sheer ritualism, which is totally ineffective in fighting corruption, favouritism, inefficiency, if the spirit for real change is lacking" within the political parties, which fail to "rise above the limitations of narrow and immediate interests".

The literature is satiated with information on decentralisation, its inception, factors enabling its foothold, its influence on empowerment of women and vulnerable groups, their political participation, impending factors in converting constitutional provisions into reality, etc. This paper presents a thematic review of literature in the context of political participation of women and the marginalized. The paper is divided into five sections. The first section begins with introduction followed by discussion on affirmative action and decentralization. The second and third sections link decentralization with inclusive development and political participation respectively, the fourth looks at participation of women and marginalized in politics, and the fifth section concludes the discussion.

2. Decentralisation and Affirmative action

The constitutionally mandated reservations in panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) brought in through 73rd Amendment have ensured women in general and those from the marginalised groups in particular participate in the decentralisation process and thereby in the village and community development. Government of India has been trying to achieve empowerment of women through

various programmes and constitutional safeguards. Economic empowerment has been targeted or recognised through women component plan, financial assistance to self help groups, gender budgeting, facilitating bank transactions, establishment of women operated bank, colleges and universities specifically established for women, social empowerment being cherished through free education to girls up to certain levels, housing schemes, access to services, etc. Political empowerment is ensured through reservation of seats for contesting elections at different levels, earmarking of funds under reserved category, etc. In GP, the provision of seats has been increased from 33% to 50% for women in some states. Although the experiences in grass root politics over the past two decades do not give us rosy pictures, there are credible incidences of change in rural area due to women's empowerment. These incidences may be few, but a beginning seems to be made. In the caste and class ridden society that prevailed for long in India, women's empowerment is emerging in different fields as a result of induced process or affirmative action (Makwana 2012).

According to Aiyer (2002), reservations for scheduled castes/scheduled tribes (SCs/STs) are generally working well. And, although there is a long way to go, he feels that reservation for women has opened the door to revolutionary changes of a political, social and cultural nature by empowering more than one million women through free and fair elections - a feature unique to India. In the first election after 73rd Amendment thousands of women entered panchayats of which 40% were represented by marginalized sections (Tiwari 2010). Using data of gram sabhas followed by household survey in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, Ban and Rao (2009) recall that in villages where the presidency is reserved for lower caste, the dominance by landowners is higher suggesting that political reservation could produce weak leaders. However, through their earlier study they presume that women could acquire more experience via reservation system and with time they are expected to become effective leaders (Ban and Rao 2008). Absence of affirmative action exclude disadvantaged groups and women as a result of which existing divisions are likely to continue (Mansuri and Rao 2013). Whereas due to affirmative action, women's' empowerment is expected to come by default making men accept the change and giving boost to girl education (Singh 2009:404). In the caste and class ridden society that prevailed for long in India, women's empowerment is emerging in different fields as a result of induced process or affirmative action.

In the absence of such initiatives specified above, decentralization remains a concept and on paper. Patnaik (2005) found that elected representatives were not able to properly articulate interests specific to their group or even exercise their own judgment in panchayat decision making, which Patnaik asserts will question the very notion of representation of the marginalised groups through affirmative action. Based on the study of four GPs in Dhenkanal district of Orissa, Patnaik concludes that affirmative action has not ensured the effective representation of the disadvantaged groups in the panchayats in terms of their participation, responsiveness to the interests of villagers and accountability to panchayats. Das (2013) in his study on Dalit and tribal leadership in Gujarat found that only one-third of the Dalit women were able to win the panchayat elections with freedom and, independently. He finds education, experience in social issues, motivation to bring development to their community, prior performance in panchayats, family support, personal relation with villagers, economic stability and family's political contacts as factors responsible for women to access panchayat positions, which indicates that the road to success is not easy for those without such background. Thorat (2002) also feels that despite several constitutional provisions, the problem of caste based violations of human rights in modified form continues to persist leading to exploitation of Dalits, especially in rural India as the underclass are yet to be fully politically mobilised against the dominant class.

Palanithurai's study (1994) revealed that the participants had a fear that the upper caste and affluent sections of their communities would not tolerate the increased number of women representatives from the SC and ST to local government bodies. The study also pointed out that women members had to face a lot of problems in the panchayat as male members sometimes did not cooperate with elected women ward members and it was difficult for women to balance their housework and their duties as elected officials. Baviskar and Mathew (2009) narrating the status of weaker sections in different states opine that affirmative action has helped SCs in West Bengal, in Uttar Pradesh they have started asserting their rights in panchyats and women show courage to hit back and insist that the money earmarked for SC welfare is spent for them. Further, they point out that while in Maharashtra SC (New Buddhists) men and women exercise their full rights in panchayats and are treated respectfully by dominant castes in panchayats, in Kerala political parties tend to ignore the role of women in panchayats, and in Manipur women panchayat leaders are found to be more

effective, work oriented and not corrupt. As against this, based on the review of the evolution of PRIs in India before 73rd Amendment and analysis of possible outcomes, Mishra (1997) observes that the although in the initial stages women played dummy role, with passage of time and right kind of training they are bound to play an effective role in decision making. Reddy (2012) opines that reservation of the seats by rotation to SCs and STs according to their proportion and one-third each for OBC and women had advanced the pace of the political mobilisation among the disadvantaged groups.

From their study of three GPs in Haryana, Ahlawat and Ahlawat (2009) opine that 73rd Amendment to theConstitution of India has given a sense of identity and dignity to the Dalits and women, forcing the dominant castes to renegotiate their relationships with them. They had started asserting themselves, although the decision making was found largely in the hands of dominant castes, which controlled the panchayat with the help of government officials. Bhargava and Subha (2009) in their study on three GPs in Bangalore rural district with a sample of one GP headed by a female SC, one by a male SC and another by a male from general category found that the policy of inclusion is being followed in PRIs of Karnataka as the reservations had increased the participation of women, but, lack of education, short tenure of president and money required for contesting election had been the hurdles in their continued participation. Suresh (2009) presents a comparative analysis of three GPs in Kerala in terms of their role in empowering the excluded communities, wherein 10% of the plan outlay is earmarked for special women component plan and 75-80% of special component plan (SCP) and tribal sub plan (TSP) are transferred to local bodies encouraging execution of schemes for the excluded groups. Women members were found to be involved in solving local problems and creating awareness. He finds that reservation has opened up the possibility of its becoming an instrument of social justice and mobilisation of depressed groups although the social empowerment of women and other disadvantaged groups remains far from adequate and their role in decision making is still minimal.

3. Decentralisation and Inclusive Development

Inclusive development ensures the participation of marginalised in the development process, wherein they become one of the stakeholders. The concept of exclusion captures the processes of disempowerment and alienation, say some social groups and neighbourhoods becoming more

detached and alienated from the mainstream society (Muddiman 2000). Joshi (2009:430) states that the objective of PRIs is to share political power in the society so as to tilt balance of power in favour of larger masses, enhance their political participation in the decision making process and thereby bring social transformation for a just and egalitarian social order.

Decentralization fits in to inclusive development structure as it itself is a model of development, which enables empowerment and upliftment of the marginalized and the poor guaranteed by institutional framework. The affirmative actions of the governments enable their participation. The very purpose of decentralisation is to develop plans for activities at the local level with the participation of all the sections of the community represented through the voices, for example gram sabha in India. Since decentralisation facilitates democratic governance that is representative, accountable, transparent and accessible to the public, it is likely to embrace inclusive development. It has been introduced in countries across the world as a mechanism to improve governance and service delivery.

The review of literature suggests that affirmative action by the government across the world has brought in significant changes in rural political life (Aziz 2000, Chattopadhyay and Dufflo, 2007) though there are a few studies which claim that reservation or affirmative action has not resulted in desired result either because women are proxied by their spouses or children or by powerful political interests in the case of SC/ST candidates and due to differences that exist between communities at local level (Pai 2001). In cases where there is limited influence of decentralisation on women's empowerment, upliftment of reserved categories and minorities, over time the affirmative actions are expected to enable these groups to assert themselves more effectively (Manor 1999). In Kerala, Kudumbshree a network of organisation of women with a focus on the poor has contributed to the effectiveness of decentralisation by generating social capital needed for influencing the course of local development (Vijayanand 2012:242). The Expert Committee (2013) on leveraging panchayats for efficient delivery of public goods and services opines that ''Reservations have combined political empowerment with social empowerment such that the earlier fears about elite groups capturing these institutions have been allayed". This argument is supported by the study of Desposate and Norrander (2005) on Latin American countries. They observe that restrictions on political participation and the social norms, which

discouraged participation for the older generation, are likely to disappear with time as new generations' experience has been different and suggests for institutionalizing political rights and descriptive representation for increasing participation.

Deshpande and Marcella (2009) observe that PRIs while being accountable and transparent offer possibilities for making local governance and the rural development process more need based, participatory and productive. Their study in 12 villages of Vidarbha, Marathwada and Western Maharashtra carried out in 2007 reveals that the rural government had become proactive in governance and development, which had become participatory and accountable. Reservations had given women a space in public and political fields, which is necessary for inclusive development. Lalita's study (2009) on an inquiry into the inclusion of excluded groups including women in social and political life of villages as against their formal inclusion by affirmative action of the government reveals mixed results. While women and SCs were active in one of the three panchayats, their inclusion was minimal in other two panchayats. Discrimination in terms of non entry to temples and sitting on the floor was practiced by SCs themselves as followers of tradition, while they were discouraged by non SCs in their economic empowerment. In Tamil Nadu, Thara Bhai (2009) found the dominance of caste and money in local politics as a result of which Dalit members and presidents and women do not get the respect and power that is due to them. But, women seem to have been doing well through SHGs. Although affirmative action has enabled representation of women and SCs their participation in real terms seems to be far away and Thara Bhai feels that to initiate this gradual process there is need for the support from civil society and government.

Based on their study in Chitradurga district of Karnataka, Nagraj and Pallavi (2013) point out that reservation in PRIs had increased the number of women members and had helped the development of tribal women who had become aware of their voting power, duties and responsibilities of panchayat members and were being supported by their family members. As per the analysis made by Crook and Alan (2001), decentralisation contributed to increased participation and representation in India and Columbia with mixed outcome in Phillippines and poor outcomes in Brazil, Chile, Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria. They observe that the decentralisation process in West Bengal and Karnataka had helped women, SCs and STs to participate in the panchayat activities although men tended to dominate and both

uneducated and SCs and STs were found engaged in meetings, contacting officials, joining associations, sending petitions, etc. An assessment of women's empowerment through GPs made by Chandrashekar and Kadam (2012) in 25 GPs of Shimoga district in Karnataka reveals entry of young and educated women in panchayat elections most of them wanting to re-contest. Further they found improvement in women's social and family status, their contribution to society in terms of public services and developmental initiatives.

Despite many efforts to include the weaker sections into the main stream, discrimination exists in many villages of the country. As put forth by Baviskar and Mathew (2009), although the scenario is changing discrimination does exist, which could be making president and panchayat members sit on the floor, keeping aside cup and plates for their use (which are required to be washed by them), creating rift between them and supporting weak SC candidates in election to control him/her after the elections are some of the tactics used by dominant castes. This is because the ''formal institutional arrangements may not adequately reflect the democratisation of a society as there is distinction between making of a democracy and deepening of a democracy" (Jairath and Sajja 2009: 79). They therefore assign successful implementation of panchayati raj in Kerala and West Bengal to social and land reforms and mass mobilization movements. Satish (2012) in his study of two villages in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh finds caste as a hurdle to the democratic spirit of decentralisation of powers and inclusion of the marginalised groups. So it is the social power that has been identified as the element that tries to pull down the very idea of decentralization of political power. Palanithurai (2012) lists around thirty types of discrimination and practice of untouchability against Dalits in four sample villages of Tamil Nadu selected for his study. He found that Dalit women panchyat leaders were not allowed to visit GP office nor preside over gram sabha. Their husbands were attending to office work as proxies.

The power structure and participation of SCs/STs/other backward castes (OBCs) and women representatives in rural local government in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra has been studied by Patil (2009) who found that although women who were housewives had entered politics due to reservations, their role in administration was nominal and they were found to be dependent on their husbands for such activities. Lack of education, knowledge about panchayat administration, poor economic status of members and president made the

dominant caste people to control GP administration as the presidents and members were largely dependent on dominant castes for agricultural work. The study on dynamics of exclusion and inclusion by Singh Santosh (2009) covering panchayat members, officials and villagers in Agra district of Uttar Pradesh reveals that women in Uttar Pradesh have always remained on the periphery, which is due to illiteracy, proxy candidature, low status of women in family and society, early marriage, poverty, burden of domestic chores, etc. However, Singh concludes that reservation had improved the bargaining power of SC women who have been using panchayats for socio-political gains and are approachable to village women for their problems.

The Citizens' Report on Governance and Development, 2010 (National Social Watch 2011) concludes that governance is far from effective and there is a long way to go before decentralised local governance can produce real gains for the marginalised sections of the society, produce inclusive development and facilitate democratic practice. In many cases inclusive development is not possible because of lack of awareness among members about panchayat activities (Rao 2012; Singh Santosh 2009; Patil 2009). Even studies carried out recently have traced discrimination against panchayat members belonging to certain castes (Baviskar and Mathew 2009; Palanithurai 2012; Satish 2012). Therefore, Bhat and Venkat Ravi (2012) stress the need to network among the SCs, STs and women in the PRIs to enable them to share their experiences and, work out combined action plan to realise their needs in an effective manner. A dismal picture of panchayati raj emerges from the statement of Bandyopadhyay and Mukherjee (2004) as they found that intended benefits of PRIs had not flown to empower the truly disempowered, the poor Dalits, minorities women, disabled, old aged and socially marginalised groups.

4. Decentralisation and Participation of women and the marginalised in politics

Decentralization strengthens citizens' participation in local government by instituting regular elections, improving access to information by fostering mechanisms for deliberative decision making on the demand side and enhances the ability of local governments to provide services by increasing their financial resources, strengthening the capacity of local officials and streamlining and rationalizing administrative functions (Mansuri and Rao 2013).

The role played by political reservations for women and disadvantaged castes (SC/ST) in local governance has also been documented

by many. The strategy of reservation has ensured representation of deprived groups in PRIs. The evidence on the role of women's reservations is mixed. A few studies found that reservations for disadvantaged castes yielded benefits to the members of these castes in the village (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Besley, Pande and Rao, 2004; Ban and Rao 2008). According to Pai (2001) reservation is helpful to disadvantaged groups and other backward classes (OBC) to identify themselves in the local governance and control the upper caste and middle caste dominance. Participation is seen as a key component to the process of decentralisation (Kulkarni 2011). In order to enable the women to participate in local governance, women have to be given positive incentives in the form of appropriate reservation system. Emphasizing the role of reservation, Crook and Manor (1998) (cited by Johnson 2001) state that "regulations stipulating the inclusion of such groups (for example the reservation system in India's panchayats) can help to ensure that poor and marginal groups have a voice in local bodies". But, Ban and Rao (2008) feel that women presidents are less likely to meet higher level officials than men, although they are knowledgeable about political activities. Their study found that the presence of women leaders did not have significant impact on women's participation in gram sabha and their participation in women's organisation, but helped them at least to talk in the gram sabha. Contrary to this argument Buch (2000) in her study of three states viz. Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan in India documents that women presidents felt improvement in their status, self confidence, life style and awareness. And more than 50% of the respondents in the study had positive views about women representatives and felt satisfied with their work though they felt that the works were carried out by presidents' husbands or other male members.

According to Singh S (2009) women in Uttar Pradesh find it difficult to participate in PRIs due to traditional and weak organisational factors. And even if they are elected under reservation quota, they remain behind the walls of the house while male members look after GP matters. Vyasalu and Vyasalu (1999) also opine that women face hurdles in political participation due to limited mobility, domestic responsibilities and historical prejudices. Das (2013) investigates hurdles for Dalit women's into political system in terms of their access to panchayat posts, factors inhibiting their access giving thought to what state institutions can do to prevent such obstructions from his study in Ahmadabad district of Gujarat. Proxy politics was found to be observed taking advantage of low gender status of Dalit women, illiteracy, old age,

widowhood, livelihood dependency and lack of financial resources. "In spite of constitutional rights and positive outcomes reported elsewhere, there are reports about continued resistance to women's power with incidences of backlash and violence and efforts to unseat them through no confidence motions" (Sharma 1998; Ramesh and Ali 2001).

Vijayalakshmi and Chandrashekar (2002) based on their study on participation of women in Karnataka reveal that although there was enhanced representation and improvement in political status of women in local government, it had not translated into effective outcomes due to gender and other social differences. In the sense, they lacked power to execute works as active participation of women was not tolerated by men. Mathew (2013:11) traces this phenomenon to inferiority complex among male members as elected women prove to be more responsive, sympathetic and caring than male members. Despite the social resistance, Das (2013) identifies a few Dalit panchayat functionaries who used their rights to grow in to role models in many villages across India.

The Expert Committee (2013) on leveraging panchayats for efficient delivery of public goods and services specifies that the reservations were given to women to make their presence in the panchayats to contribute to good financial management and honest, corruption-free services and positively affect the role and place of women in public life with ultimate impact on the household. But, the problem of social and political exclusion still exists in some cases at GP level as decisions regarding planning and budgeting is done by male members. Duflo and Topalova (2004) point out in their study of 24 Indian states that female presidents of GPs performed better than male leaders in providing public services, such as water supply and sanitation. Similar studies (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Rajasekhar and Manjula, 2011) indicate that the representation of women has resulted in better service delivery. Female members were also found to be more effective leaders when they had spent a longer time in power, and they were more effective in states where a reservation system had been in place for a longer time (Ban and Rao 2008). Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) in their study on West Bengal and Rajasthan found that women leaders bring benefits to their villages by providing public goods preferred by women. For example, the war against insanitation is reported to be fought by women in Haryana through campaigns for toilets. The parents place a simple condition before the bridegrooms that the household should have a toilet before they marry their daughters (Water and Sanitation Program 2010). Bhargava and Subha (2009) in their study of GPs with SC, ST and women

presidents in Bangalore rural district, found that women approach female president with their problems relating to widow pension, access to drinking water, housing, sanitation, family fights, disputes with neighbour, etc., and many of these problems were solved through various programmes for the weaker sections.

The study by Bhat and Venkat Ravi (2012) found that the presence of SCs/STs and women representatives in panchyats encouraged people to participate actively in development matters. Their study identified successful cases of administration by female president in Himachal Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka where there was greater efficiency and transparency in the running of public affairs. The welfare of women, water supply and sanitation, maternal care, fight against alcohol consumption, improving mid day meals, attending to school dropout cases, creation of garden for children, construction of toilets, roads, etc., were taken up by female presidents in the sample GPs of the above districts, while in some cases the priorities and felt needs of SCs and STs was not considered as SC/ST leaders joined hands with upper caste men. Further, the study found that in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, political parties selected women of their choice for GP president.

5. Conclusions

Decentralisation process initiated in mid eighties has spread across the country and today we have more than 33% of GP members represented by women and 29% belonging to the marginalised groups. However, there are mixed opinions about their involvement in the decentralisation process. Although their entry into politics has been ensured through affirmative action, questions arise on whether this has resulted in their political participation and inclusive development. The review presented above tries to discuss decentralisation focusing on the above two issues.

The review points out that women are largely proxied by their husbands, sons or other influential persons in the village, but were found to be less corrupt as against its high prevalence in earlier system. Their participation in the local government facilitated by affirmative action has led to inclusiveness of both women and the marginalised and empowered them politically though only a minority of them have benefited over and above mere representation. There is also an enhancement in their economic status, self confidence and improvement in social status. Education and social background of the members are found to be the factors motivating empowerment and participation while poverty and continuity of faithfulness

to the dominant castes appear to be the obstacles. The literature indicates that real empowerment is possible only when the marginalised viz. SCs/STs and women influence decision making, which is a sign of their being included overcoming their earlier state of exclusion (Bhaviskar and Mathew 2009). However, some studies have not found major improvement in the living conditions in particular of the Dalits in GPs with Dalit presidents (Palanithurai 2012).

The benefits are not reaching the marginalised to the expected level due to their low social status and lack of awareness. The studies carried out for more than a decade to date indicate that men still take advantage of reservation and proxy them. Unless awareness is created on a large scale they are likely to remain on the periphery on account of illiteracy, proxy candidature, poverty, dependence on dominant classes for work, etc. The short tenure of the president and money required for contesting elections have also been the hurdles in their continued participation. There is a common agreement on the importance of training to members of PRIs.

Earlier studies on rural administration (Hiramani 1979; Mukhopadyay 1982; Sharma 1985; Rao 1989; Iyer 1989) largely indicate the influence of elite and upper castes in politics, which used power for protecting their self interests and that of their community denying decision making power to the downtrodden and common man, thereby failing to sustain or achieve the objectives of decentralisation. However, the traces of transition are seen across the country with many women taking the lead and taking the benefit of affirmative action set in by the Constitution of India and respective state governments. While many others factors have played some role, review suggests that mandatory reservation or quota ensured through constitutional provision is the main factor contributing to entry of women in politics (Pande and Deanna 2011). And most of the studies agree that reservation has enabled participation of women in PRIs although the degree and intensity of participation varied significantly across the country.

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COVID-19 a 'Metropolitan Battle': Impacts and Lessons from Indian Metropolitan Cities

Joy Karmakar

Abstract

Spatial and temporal distribution of COVID-19 cases shows that people in the metropolitan areas suffered maximum. This is why experts often call COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a 'metropolitan battle'. This is also pushing a new urban paradigm which focused on concepts like circular economy, sustainable governance, and compact city. This paper makes an attempt to understand the impacts of COVID-19 in the selected metropolitan cities in India. After introduction the subsequent section of the paper analyzes the case prevalence, incidence rate and case specific deaths in the cities. Key measures to prevent the spread of the disease during the first and second waves have also been discussed along with the above measures. Various impacts like digital divide and its challenges have been identified. Likewise, challenges of the urban poor and migrant workers are also discussed in detail. Finally based on metropolitan experience several long term strategies have been prescribed to cope with the 'new normal' situation in the cities. These measures are likely to bring about new urban paradigm in cities.

Keywords: Covid-19, Metropolitan battle, New normal, digital divide

1.0 Introduction

Urban areas are on the forefront of reactions to the COVID-19 emergency. They play a critical role in executing nation-wide measures, yet in addition they provide laboratories for bottom-up and innovative recovery strategies. It is believed that COVID-19 sped up the shift towards a new urban paradigm. This new paradigm is focused on inclusive, green and smart cities. Experts have often noted that the corona virus is fundamentally a 'metropolitan battle'. This is because the urban areas are densely populated thus the risk of spreading the infection

due to the close proximity among residents and challenges to implement social distancing. In addition, it brings a higher scale of challenge and opportunities due to its size. Also, cities manifest inequalities and high concentration of urban poor who are more vulnerable than compared to those in less crowded areas and having better access to services. According to some groups of scholars the periphery of cities are the main centers of pandemics since virus are often hatched and transmitted via peri-urban communities and transportation corridors at the outskirts of cities before they spread into the downtown core (OECD, 2020).

Another aspect is the pollution level in the cities that effects the population. It is also a known to cause lung and heart damage and likely accounts for at least 7 million early deaths a year (Carrington, 2019). People with previous respiratory conditions like asthma or persistent bronchitis can be more vulnerable to COVID-19. This may have a more serious impact on city dwellers and those exposed to toxic fumes, than on others. Therefore COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to the city dwellers, policy makers and planners to rethink their production, consumption and travelling behaviour. More specifically scholars points out that 'life after COVID-19' will be 'life with COVID-19', therefore there is an urgent need to rebuild cities for the long term, based on new approaches to urban space that take into consideration different needs and transfer from a logic of *mobility* to one of *accessibility* to basic amenities and services. It is argued that key concepts such as the "circular economy", the "localization of the Sustainable Development Goals", "tactical urbanism[1]" and "the 15-min city[2]" can all help to achieve better quality of life while preserving productivity, social inclusion and the environment.

Corona virus has brought an exceptional challenge to India's metropolitan cities and once again it exhibits restricted abilities to self-administer. Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Ahmedabad presently account for nearly half of country's COVID-19 cases. These metropolitan cities have been most affected by both the first and second waves. In fact, experts also highlighted that third wave is likely to hit mostly these metropolitan cities. Second wave is already plateauing but it will take more time to fall, as suggested by the experts. Several measures have been taken by city administrations to prevent the spread and treat the affected people. One of the significant strategies taken by many Indian metropolises is the 'ATM strategy' to manage the situation. This ATM

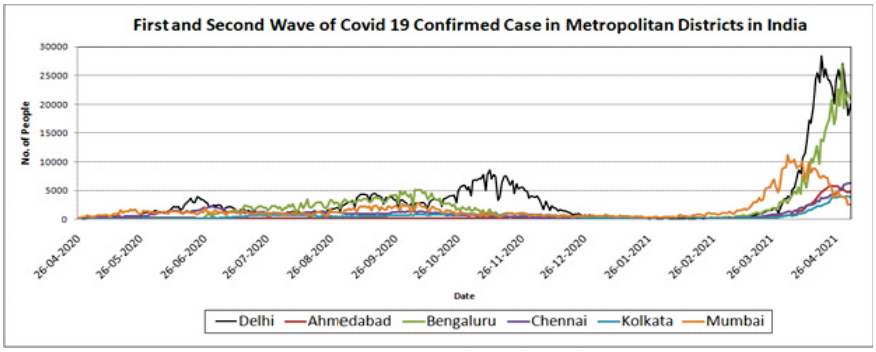
[1]It refers to "organizational, and/or citizen-led approach to neighbourhood building using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change. The term Tactical Urbanism has been introduced in the 21st century as an approach that focuses on quick and easy actions to demonstrate the possibility of large-scale and long-term changes in cities. The concept was enhanced in 2011 due to the publication of a group of young urbanists, Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia. According to them, Tactical Urbanism advocates that there should exist a close link between society and public authorities called "Bottom up - Top Down", demonstrating that it is possible to start from the public spheres and/or from the civil society the desire to promote new urban experiences, appropriations, preservation of the built environment of the city and democratization of urban land use, as long as there is social participation.

strategy stands for 'Assess, Triage and Transfer, and Management' (Livemint, 2021). However, apart from treatment strategy of the affected people, several other strategies have been taken to control the situation including social distancing, lockdown, and declaration of containment zones. These strategies directly impacted on the urban communities irrespective of their economic background. These impacts included social, cultural, economic, psychological and economic. Due to these impacts, several debates are also emerged in the popular media including role of migrant labour, ability to use digital tools and role of public space in the cities.

With this background this paper throws some light on the various impacts generated due to the several measures taken either by city administrations or state governments. After the introductory section, the second section analyzes the current situation of the COVID-19 cases in the metropolitan cities. Third part of the paper deals with various debates and challenges faced by the metropolises. Fourth section of the paper notes the various impacts of lockdown and other measures on urban community. Thereafter a conclusion has been drawn based on the impacts, measures and challenges encountered by the urban community.

1.1 From first wave to second wave-key measures

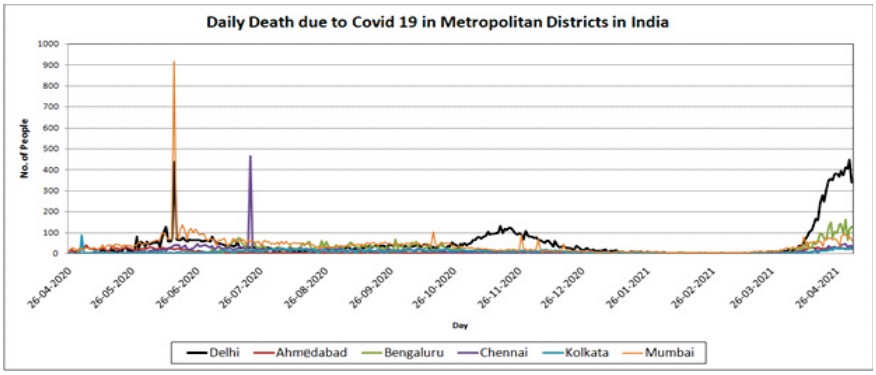
India declared nationwide official lockdown first on 25th March 2020 for 21 days; later it was extended gradually for three months and ended in June, 2020. In 2021 various states of India once again declared official lockdowns for varying periods due to the second wave. Lockdown was declared under National Disaster Management Act (NDMA) 2005. Initial purpose of the lockdown was to stop the spread of infection at the community level. So, based on the risk profile three different zones namely red, orange and green have been identified by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW). Green zones are identified as districts with either zero confirmed case of COVID-19 or no confirmed case in the last 21 days. Red Zone or Hot spot zones are identified based on total number of confirmed case, doubling rate of confirmed case, extent of testing and surveillance feedback. Orange zones are defined as district neither fall in red zoned nor in the green zones (MHA, 2020). At the beginning, COVID-19 cases in India were found primarily in the metropolitan cities namely Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai. It is evident from the fig 1 that first wave of COVID-19 case in India was concentrated in the metropolitan cities because daily highest confirmed cases in these metropolises went up to five



Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021, ***Fig 1***

thousands. Only in case of Delhi daily highest confirmed case during first wave reached 8593. First wave of COVID-19 cases started to rise rapidly from the month of June, 2020.

Cases of first wave peaked in these metropolises during the month of September and October 2020. Thereafter COVID-19 cases dipped steadily and for almost two months (January and February 2021) COVID-19 cases were the lowest. Once again number of infected people started to rise since the beginning of March 2021 and it peaked in April 2021. During the month of May 2021 the number infected people started to decline. Number of daily deaths due to COVID-19 was remaining within 100, except few days when death toll reached more than 500 especially in Delhi, and Ahmedabad. Following figure 2 indicates the daily death toll in these metropolitan cities till the month of May 5th.



Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021, ***Fig 2***

To understand the COVID-19 situation in the metropolitan cities several indicators are considered. Point prevalence[3] is significant measure to assess the gravity of the situation. It is evident from the Table 1 that point prevalence was not uniform across the different metropolitan cities. In fact, during the peak of COVID-19 cases in September 2020, point prevalence was highest in Mumbai followed by Bengaluru, Chennai and Delhi. At the same time point prevalence of COVID-19 case in Kolkata was the lowest.

Table 1: Comparing Point Prevalence among the Indian Metropolitan Cities

District	Point prevalence		
	16th Sept 2020	1st Feb 2021	5th May 2021
Delhi	0.218	0.074	0.672
Ahmedabad	0.105	0.066	1.267
Bengaluru	0.497	0.097	3.794
Mumbai	1.309	0.581	2.314
Chennai	0.276	0.123	0.815
Kolkata	0.128	0.095	0.666

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021, calculated by author

In February, 2021 point prevalence was lowest in Ahmedabad, followed by Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru. But in case of Mumbai point prevalence remained highest even in February 2021. In May, 2021 point prevalence was the highest in Bengaluru followed by Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Point prevalence in May in Kolkata and Delhi was the least. This indicates that higher point prevalence in Mumbai was consistent throughout the first wave and second wave. Another indicator is the incidence rate of COVID-19 case which is also not homogeneous across the metropolitan cities in India as evident from the Table 2.

Table 2: Comparing Incidence Rate among the Indian Metropolitan Cities

District	Incidence Rate		
	April to Sept 2020	Sept 2020 to February 2021	February to May 2021
Delhi	1.407	2.474	3.780
Ahmedabad	0.614	0.482	2.305
Bengaluru	2.135	2.591	5.499
Mumbai	5.703	4.321	11.530
Chennai	3.262	1.719	2.855
Kolkata	1.070	1.774	1.852

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021, calculated by author

[3] Point prevalence refers to the prevalence measured at a particular point in time. It is the proportion of persons with a particular disease or attribute on a particular date. Prevalence differs from incidence in that prevalence includes all cases, both new and preexisting, in the population at the specified time, whereas incidence is limited to new cases only.

From April to September 2020, incidence rate[4] was the highest in Mumbai followed by Chennai and Bengaluru. Cities like Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Delhi occupied the lowest incidence rate in the same period. Thereafter, incidence rate rose slightly in Delhi, Bengaluru and Kolkata while it dipped in Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Chennai. As a result, overall confirmed cases in the country fell sharply from October 2020 to February 2021 since metropolitan cities comprise almost one third of the total cases in India. COVID-19 specific deaths also varies across the metropolitan cities as evident in the Table 3.

Table: 3 Comparison of COVID-19 specific Death across the Indian Metropolitan Cities

District	Covid-19 Specific Death per 5000 population		
	April to Sept 2020	Oct to Feb 2021	Feb to May 2021
Delhi	1.63	1.67	2.20
Ahmedabad	1.62	0.43	0.66
Bengaluru	1.73	0.86	1.54
Mumbai	14.47	3.94	3.48
Chennai	3.45	0.96	0.90
Kolkata	1.90	1.51	0.53

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021, calculated by author

Mumbai recorded the highest number of deaths due to COVID-19 from April 2020 to till May 2021. The higher death rate is consistent in Mumbai while, death rate in other metropolises fluctuates throughout the year. From April to September 2020 death per 5000 population was highest in Mumbai followed by Chennai and Kolkata respectively. From October 2020 to February 2021 Chennai, Bengaluru, and Ahmedabad recorded the lowest number of deaths per 5000 population.

Apart from lockdowns several other measures were taken to curb the spread of the virus. One of them was to declare containment zones within red or orange zones. The most sensitive areas of the country, from the spread of COVID-19 perspective, and falling inside the Red and Orange Zones, are assigned as Containment Zones. The containment areas have been defined by respective district administrations, taking into account the total number of active cases, their geographical spread, and the need to have well demarcated perimeters from the enforcement point of view. Guidelines also noted that the local authority shall ensure 100 percent coverage of Aarogya Setu app among the residents of the

[4]Incidence rate or person-time rate is a measure of incidence that incorporates time directly into the denominator. This denominator represents the total time the population was at risk of and being watched for disease. Thus, the incidence rate is the ratio of the number of cases to the total time the population is at risk of disease.

Containment Zone. Containment zones would have intensified surveillance protocols, with contact tracing, house to house surveillance, home/institutional quarantining of persons based on their risk assessment, and clinical management. Most of the commercial and private establishments have been allowed in the Red Zones. These include print and electronic media, IT and IT enabled services, data and call centres, cold storage and warehousing services, private security and facility management services, and services provided by self-employed persons, except for hair cutting saloons. Movement of individuals and vehicles is allowed only for permitted activities, with a maximum of 2 persons (besides the driver) in four-wheeler vehicles, and with no pillion rider in the case of two-wheelers. Industrial establishments in urban areas, viz., Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Export Oriented Units (EOUs), industrial estates and industrial townships with access control have been permitted. However, all standalone (single) shops, neighborhood (colony) shops and shops in residential complexes are permitted to remain open in urban areas, without any distinction of essential and non-essential. E-Commerce activities, in the Red Zones, are permitted only in respect of essential goods. Private offices can operate with up to 33 percent strength as per requirement, with the remaining persons working from home (GOI, 2020). All these measures were taken to contain the spread of the virus in the country. The following section will shed light on some of the effects that emerged due to lockdown process.

1.2Impacts of Locking and Unlocking in the Metropolitan Cities

Due to lockdown different spheres of people's lives have been affected directly or indirectly in India. After a few weeks of lockdown, popular media highlighted several challenges encountered by the residents of metropolitan cities including migration of informal labour, digital divide, lack of affordable housing for migrant workers, and vulnerability of urban poor especially who are living in the slums. some of these effects are closely interlinked with each other. Moreover, it is seen that subsequent unlocking process failed to fully reduce these impacts on people. Following are some of the significant impacts that have been illustrated with Indian examples.

1.2.1 Digital Divide

The term digital divide entered public discourse and became very popular in the last year of the 1990s (van Dijk, 2000). Scholarly literature and that of international organizations noted that the divide should be defined in terms both of access and of the use of

ICT. In the European Union, the term "e-inclusion" was introduced in 2006 by the European Commission as a part of the third pillar of the 2010 policy initiative (2010) with the commitment to halving the digital divide by 2010 (EIU, 2008). Even in the ASEAN countries, there was the initiative of the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement in 2000. However, this has not yet been achieved, and there are still significant differences between individuals, groups, regions, and countries in terms of reaching and sharing ICTs.

The digital divide is one of the many inequalities exposed by COVID-19. Digitalization is a big force in cities' response to the pandemic. It helps to monitor contagion risk and ensuring confinement and social distancing. Moreover digitalization enables the continuation of economic activity virtually. It is believed that digital tools will remain permanent components of cities' recovery phase and increased preparedness for potential new waves. According to a 2015 report by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IMAI), urban India internet users are 246 million while monthly active internet users are 209 million. Largest set of Monthly Active Users are college going students. Mobile internet user base in urban India is 197 million (IMAI, 2015). The following table 4 shows the number of active internet users in Indian metropolis.

It is apparent from the Table 4 that active users base of internet in Indian metropolis varies greatly. Number of active internet users in Chennai, Kolkata and Bengaluru are less compare to Delhi and Mumbai. Telecoms Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) report on 2020 suggests that number of subscribers to internet in urban India is 457 million (TRAI, 2020). In fact the number of internet users in India increased by 47 million (8.2 percent) between 2020 and 2021. The following Table 5 shows the number of internet subscriber in 2020 across different metropolis.

Table 4: Monthly Active Users of Internet in Indian Metropolis, 2015

Cities	Monthly Active Users of Internet in millions
Mumbai	15.9
Delhi	12.2
Kolkata	6.4
Chennai	5.3
Bengaluru	6.4
Ahmedabad	6.7

Source: IMRB I-Cube 2015, October 2015,

The above Table 5 clearly indicates

Table 5: Number of Internet Subscribers, June 2020

Service Area	Internet Subscribers (in millions)in Urban Areas
Delhi	39.83
Mumbai	27.75
Kolkata	16.05

Source: The Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators, 2020

that number of internet users in the metropolises more than doubled from 2015 but there is a great disparity in terms of gender. There are 71 percent male and 29 percent female Internet users in India. In urban India, the ratio between male to female Internet users is 62:38. This ratio was 64:36 in October 2014. Internet users among urban females are growing at a rate of 43 percent compared to 34 percent among males (IMAI, 2015). This helps us to understand that digital divide in India is much wider especially in metropolises and spread across gender and class dimensions. This divide greatly affected the poor students because they have to engage in online classes daily at least 2 to 3 hours. There is so far little effort by the government to remove this wider digital disparity in cities.

1.2.2 Migration and Livelihood of the Urban Poor

Migration plays a crucial role in the process of economic development particularly in the contemporary phase of globalization. In India, the problem of migration has acquired severity as migrants have shown high selectivity in choosing their destinations, leading to regionally unbalanced urbanization as also distortions in urban hierarchy. Presently, migration crisis is taking the centre stage of discussion in the mainstream media due to COVID-19 pandemic. It once again reminds us that a sound policy is necessary for balanced urbanization and tackling unemployment problem in rural areas. However in the epidemics of the past (During Spanish flu in the colonial period) migration and livelihood was hardly an issue of concern (Banthia and Dyson, 1999; Hill, 2011). It was expected that when migrants flee from the city they not only lose their livelihood but they may carry the infections to their native places (Biswas, 2020).

A telephonic survey of more than 3000 migrants from North Central India by Jan Sahas (2020) reported that majority of the migrant workers were the daily wage earners and at the time of lockdown, 42 percent were left with no ration, one third was stuck at destinations city with no access to food, water and money, 94 percent

don't have worker's identity card (Sahas, 2020). Majority of the migrants are migrating from the metropolises to their homes in rural areas. Following Table 6 shows the share of migrant in the selected metropolises in India.

It is apparent from the Table 6 that migrants constitute more than 50 percent to the total population in cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai. Moreover, media reports also highlighted that amid the first wave many of them making the journey on foot, as businesses abruptly shut because of the nationwide lockdown, leaving them without money and shelter. Dozens of them lost their lives as they walked hundreds of miles home as buses and trains stopped plying during the lockdown. Due to the bitter experience of the first wave many migrants fled from cities even before travel restrictions were imposed during the second wave (Nanda and Ghosh, 2021). In fact, during the first wave the Ministry of Home Affairs had given an advisory for health actions at places of congregation of 14 migrant workers (Government of India, 2020), which included the three types of migrant workers and their health risk management.

Table 6: Migrant Share and Interstate Migrants in the Metropolises of India

Urban Agglomeration	Percentage of migrants to total population	% Share of inter-state migrants to total migrants
Delhi	43.1	87.8
Mumbai	54.9	46
Kolkata	40.8	18.2
Chennai	51	11.8
Bengaluru	52.3	35.1
Ahmedabad	48.7	24.1

Source: Census of India 2011, D3 (Appendix) Migration Table,

1. Migrant workers who are still in the cities of local residence, if they are found to be forming any congregation in bus station/railway stations or any other place of the city, recording of details of such people and following them up for 14 days and risk screening by district health authorities.

2. Migrant workers who are on their way and are yet to reach their destination city/village, for them the quarantine centres were to be set-up with proper amenities. Thermal screening to be carried out with appropriate actions for suspected or confirmed cases. They will be encouraged to be in contact with their families
3. Migrant workers who have reached

their destination will be identified by the district administration and Integrated Disease Surveillance Project (IDSP) will follow them up at their residence.

Even after the above advisory given by the Union Government, many state governments failed to trace the returnee. It is also reported that despite the second wave being more infective and taking a larger death toll in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, the Bihar government failed to prepare for the wave even to the levels they had in the first wave (Ray, 2021). Experts noted that lack of affordable housing for informal workers in the metropolises is one of the reasons behind this huge reverse migration (Chaturvedi, 2020; Karmakar, 2020). Moreover it is pointed out that weak public food distribution system in the cities was also responsible for reverse migration. Therefore we need a flexible national public food distribution system in which migrant people can collect their food all over in India.

1.2.3 Density and the urban poor living in Slums

Another important idea that is debated in the popular media was the density and its role in the spreading of the virus especially in the slums of the cities as well as city structure. Ideas of compact cities have long been praised for their benefits, which include dense development patterns, better accessibility to local services and jobs, short intra urban distances and public transport systems with positive contributions to the efficiency of infrastructure investments, the reduction of energy consumption and CO2 emissions as well as knowledge diffusion and economic growth. Even in the COVID-19 context, dense urban environments can provide quicker access to health and social services, create support networks to combat social isolation and make use of "social infrastructure" (i.e. community institutions) to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic. At the same time, debates have started to emerge on the vulnerability of densely populated cities and the likelihood of fast spread of the virus, due to the close proximity among residents and the difficulty in applying social distancing measures. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, social distancing, on a large scale across the world, is a physical impossibility in slums due to the high density of buildings and persons per dwelling (Lesely and David 2020). Furthermore, residents of urban slums have increased risks for respiratory infections due to increased levels of air pollution (Frisen and Pelz, 2020). Dahab et al (2020) noted that residents of the slums are much more threatened by severe disease outcomes due to the higher transmissibility of the disease, higher infection-to-case

ratios, and higher case fatality. The following table shows the number of slum households as well as population density of the Indian metropolises.

While looking at Table 7 it appears

Table 7: Slum Households and Population Density in the Cities

City	Slum Households	Population Density per sq. Km
Delhi	383609	25027
Mumbai	1101655	19652
Kolkata	285558	24306
Chennai	315806	26553
Bengaluru	178377	11394
Ahmedabad	50909	10847

Source: Census of India 2011

that the each of the metropolises has very high population density as well as presence of huge number of slum households. Both these factors jointly effected the spread of the virus and this has been reflected in the large number of corona cases during (till 26th April, 2021) the second wave. Among the cities Delhi occupies as the first position in terms of highest spike and total death toll while Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai occupied the third, fourth and seventh position respectively. Media reports show that small towns are relatively less affected by COVID-19 cases. Newspaper reports also suggest that case fatality and infection rates are higher in metropolitan cities in India compared to small towns (Yadav, 2021). In addition, lack of sanitation and water in the household premises of the slums multiplied the infection rate in the metropolises. However, efforts have been made by local governments to improve the conditions of public latrines during the second wave. For instance residents in Dharavi slum Mumbai highlighted that earlier public toilets were being cleaned once in week but during the second wave it is being done every day. Local government also provided soap, sanitizer and box for disposing sanitary pads (Srivastava, 2021). Such small measures helped greatly to reduce the infection rate in the city subsequently.

1.2.4 Environmental Impacts

Due to the lockdown two monumental impacts have been recorded. One of the significant and positive effects of the lockdown was the improvement of air quality in the major metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. Similar trend is also noticed in tier 2 cities in India.

Several studies have shown that during the 'Janata Curfew'[5] pollution level remain 'good' in the cities. Among the various pollutants PM2.5 drastically declined during the lockdown. This is due to complete halt of public and private transportation except essential services (Sree et.al. 2021). Significant improvement of water quality was also noticed across the various rivers. Data from the CPCB (Central Pollution Control Board) shows that the Ganga's water along its most polluted stretch in Uttar Pradesh is carrying more dissolved oxygen and lesser nitrates. These conditions are conducive to survival of aquatic life. Its biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) has correspondingly fallen, along with the concentration of total coliform, which is a testimony to improved water quality. Similar positive developments have been reported for the Yamuna (Tripathi, 2020). Nationwide lockdown also reduced municipal solid waste (MSW) generation. For instance daily tonnage of MSW has fallen 28 percent in case of Chennai. Similar has been the experience in other metropolises; in Pune it fall 29 percent (Tripathi, 2020). Therefore it is evident that due to lockdown several positive environmental effects have been recorded but the question is that can we continue with such measures in future, in other words is it a sustainable measure for improvement of the environment?

1.2.5 Economic Impacts

Among the various impacts of covid-19, economic impacts are perhaps more visible and badly affected the people and the country as whole. The global growth contraction for 2020 is estimated at 3.5 percent by IMF. The global economy is projected to grow 5.5 percent in 2021 and 4.2 percent in 2022 (World Economic Outlook, 2021). In 2020 India's economic growth had fallen 8 percent as per estimation by the IMF. This is evident in metropolitan cities where large numbers of daily wagers became jobless for a long period of time. Low-paid workers, who are likely to have fewer savings and less likely to be able to telework, were severely hit by measures such as social distancing and closures in retail, transport, restaurants and other services. In addition, women, who are represented in service sectors (e.g. tourism, hotels, and restaurants) that rely on physical interaction with customers, have been negatively affected by economic downturn arising from COVID-19. The impact of unemployment has amplified existing socio-economic vulnerabilities and disproportionately affected vulnerable populations and minorities. Center for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) estimated that urban unemployment rate reached 15.4 percent during month of June 2021 in India. Unemployment rate in Delhi reached 45 percent in the month of May 2021 as estimated by CMIE.

While national governments

[5] Janta curfew was announced on 22nd March 2020 by prime minister Modi across the country

announced measures to protect their economies from the enormous economic fallout from the COVID-19 crisis, city administrations also need to play a significant role in developing locally tailored recovery strategies, boosting local economy with public investment, and supporting small and medium enterprises. But most of the Indian metropolitan cities failed to prescribe any recovery strategies to boost the local economy. One of the reasons behind such failures is the lack of power at the metropolitan level governance. For instance Mumbai's Mayor has tenure of 2.5 years, Delhi and Bengaluru, a mere one year. Furthermore, head of the local government (Mayor) do not have full decision-making authority over critical functions of planning, housing, water, environment, and fire and emergency services in most cases.

1.3 Lessons to be learned from 'Metropolitan Battle'

As observed earlier many experts view COVID-19 as primarily a 'metropolitan battle' therefore we can learn many lessons from impacts of the lockdown and subsequent events. Firstly COVID-19 has had asymmetrical impacts across different metropolises but many policy responses are place blind and uniform. The response should be place based and people centric. For example measures prescribed for high income residential areas may not be suitable for slum areas. Here we need innovative ideas for effective results. Secondly, economic and social shock due to health crisis is not at the similar level across the cities; exposure and recovery of the people depends on the industrial composition, level of labour market breakdown and volume of trade in the cities. Thirdly, compactness of the city or more precisely density has a significant role to play with mobility and accessibility of the people. There is an ease of mobility in cities having mixed land use compared to cities having sharp division of land use. Compact nature of the city provides better public service, quicker transport and reduces pollution levels. Therefore we need more compact cities in future to achieve a sustainable future. Fourthly, COVID-19 also uncovered vulnerable groups in large cities including migrants, the slum dwellers, women and the elderly. Among them the poor migrants had to leave the city due to unemployment and lack of food. So we need to develop a robust public food distribution system in which the migrant labour can draw their share of the food at any city in the country. Fifthly, Apart from lack of food, the reason behind the migration of labour to their rural homes is the lack of housing more particularly affordable housing (Chaturvedi, 2020; Karmakar, 2020). Experts argue that cities need to develop affordable housing that is to be flexible and transitory and access to

this kind of housing is to be based on work status (Bhan, 2020).

This pandemic calls for stronger focus on preparedness and resilience for future shocks. Indian cities need a wider churning with regards to its local governance, planning, and public participation. Indian Constitution mandates the formation of Metropolitan Planning Committees (MPC) in cities with million plus populations. However in reality most cities either failed to form MPC or if constituted, it remained defunct (Vachna, 2020). It is believed that digitalization is going to be a game changer in the 'new normal'; however there are wide disparities with respect to access by various classes of citizens even in the metropolitan areas. To be a 'digital city' we need to stress more on the availability and accessibility of internet. Moreover internet access has to be continuous throughout the day which is still a distant dream for majority of urban poor.

1.4 Conclusions

In this paper the author has tried to focus on the impacts of COVID-19 in the metropolitan cities in India. Before explaining the details of the impact, key measures taken by the Union and State governments during the first and second waves of the pandemic have been discussed. Measures like case prevalence, incidence rate, case specific death rate of each metropolitan city have been analyzed. Such measures reveal that Mumbai and Delhi had higher case prevalence and incidence rate compare to other cities.

The idea that COVID-19 is a 'metropolitan battle' has been explained through various direct impacts occurred in the metropolitan cities. The impacts range from digital divide, improvement of environmental condition, migration, to lack of effective local governance in cities. Impact of pandemic widens the existing inequalities between the urban poor and others in the city. Migration from the city to rural areas exposes the structural inequality and highlights the vulnerable groups in the city. Discussion clearly shows that the cities failed to prevent the reverse migration during the first and second waves largely due to the lack of decision making power of the local authorities. Therefore this article pointed out several lessons that can be taken into consideration to make our cities more resilient in the future. Several new concepts are emerging across the globe to cope with 'new normal' situation. These concepts include circular economy, tactical urbanism to localization of sustainable development goals. Though implementation of these measures at the city or metropolitan level will be a major challenge, there will be a paradigm shift for cities in India if it is done.

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Zilla Parishad and DRDA in Odisha: The Dichotomy of Empowerment

Manoj Kumar Sahu

1. Introduction:

The most outstanding and notable initiative to institutionalize and invigorate the institutions of democratic decentralization down to grassroots level was the 73rd Amendment Act, passed in December 1992. The Act is the culmination of a series of interventions by the state to revive and formalise the panchayats since the inception of the Constitution. It heralded a new era in the field of local government and local governance. As mandate by the Amendment Act, most of the state governments have established three-tier Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) at three levels - district, block and village having nomenclatures of Zilla Parishad, Panchahat Samiti/Mandal Panchayat and Gram Panchayats respectively. The PRIs have also been empowered by the state governments through devolution of functions, functionaries and finances in different degrees.

The Zilla Parishad stands at the apex of the PRI pyramid, but with little powers. On the other hand, another district level body, the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) has emerged as a powerful institution as all the Centrally-sponsored programmes and funds released by the Ministry of Rural Development are routed through the agency which is registered under Societies Registration Act. Such an arrangement is contrary to the spirit of 73rd Amendment of the Constitution. The empowerment objective underlying the Amendment Act becomes irrelevant and meaningless for the Zilla Parishads, given the important and crucial role of the DRDA in rural development administration. This is the dichotomy of empowerment and in this paper an attempt is made to examine the issue with reference to Odisha.

It will be pertinent here to first discuss the status and role of these two bodies - Zilla Parishad and the DRDA in local governance.

2. Zilla Parishad in Odisha

Zilla Parishad stands at the apex of the panchayati raj pyramid in Odisha and it functions at the district level. It is primarily a coordinating and supervisory body. The constitution and working of Zilla Parishads are governed by Orissa Zilla Parishad Act, 1991, duly modified in the light of the 73rd CAA; the Orissa Zilla Parishad (Election) Rules, 1994; the Orissa Zilla Parishad (Conduct of Proceedings) Rules, 1996 and the Orissa Zilla Parishad (Constitution of Standing Committees) Rules,2000.

The powers and functions and working of Zilla Parishads have been enumerated in detail in the Orissa Zilla Parishad Act, 1991. The details are given below:

Every Parishad shall have the power to—

i. undertake schemes or adopt measures including giving of financial assistance relating to the development of agriculture, social forestry, livestock, industries, co-operative movement, rural credit, water-supply, distribution of essential commodities, rural electrification including distribution of electricity, minor irrigation, public health and sanitation including establishment of dispensaries and hospitals, communications, primary, secondary and adult education including welfare and other objects of general public utility;

ii. undertake execution of any scheme, performance of any act, or management of any institution or organization entrusted to it by the Government or any other authority from time to time;

iii. manage or maintain any work of public utility or any institution vested in it or under its control and management;

iv. grant aid to any school, public library, public institution or public welfare organisation within the district;

v. contribute such sums as may be agreed upon towards the cost of maintenance of any institution situated outside the district which is beneficial to and habitually used by the inhabitants of the district;

vi. establish scholarships or award stipends within the State for the furtherance of technical or other special forms of education;

vii. acquire and maintain village haats and markets either directly or through the Panchayat Samitis or Gram Panchayats ;

viii. make grants to Samitis or Gram Panchayats within the district;

ix. adopt measures for the relief of distress;

x. co-ordinate and integrate the development plans and the schemes prepared by a Samiti in the district ;

xi. examine and approve the budget estimates of Samitis in the district;

xii. prepare, execute and supervise the district plan relating to—

(a) monitoring and supervision of programmes like Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (J.R.Y.) to be directly implemented by Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti;

(b) implementation of anti-poverty programmes and monitoring supervision thereof;

(c) discharge of responsibilities and functions as assigned to the District Rural Development Agencies from time to time; and

(d) distribution of untied funds.

For the efficient discharge of its functions the Parishad constitutes Committees, and Standing Committees. The Parishad has power to co-opt such number of persons from outside as may be prescribed.

The Parishad prepares in such form and at such time, as may be prescribed, an annual report giving a true and full account of its activities during the previous year and copies thereof are forwarded to the Government. The Government has to lay on the table of the Legislature all such reports together with their comments thereon. Every Parishad also furnishes to the Government such returns, statistics and other information with respect to its activities as the Government may from time to time require.

All moneys received by the Parishad constitute a fund called the 'Zilla Parishad Fund'. The fund is vested in the Parishad and is applied for the performances specified in this Act and for such other purposes and in prescribed manner.

The **sources of income** of a Parishad consist of—

(i) the Central or State Government funds allotted to the Parishad;

(ii) grants from All-India Bodies and Institutions for the development of cottage, village and small scale industries and the like;

(iii) such share of the land cess or any other cess or State taxes allotted under any law or fees as may be prescribed;

(iv) income from endowments, trusts or other institutions administered by the Parishad;

(v) donations and contributions from the Samitis or from the public in any form

The Collector of the district is the Chief Executive Officer of the Parishad who, subject to the provisions of this Act, shall exercise such powers and perform such functions as may be prescribed. The State Government may appoint such number of Executive Officers to the Parishad as may be expedient, who shall remain under the administrative control of the Chief Executive Officer and shall exercise such powers and perform such functions as may be prescribed. The Project Officer, District Rural Development Agency is the ex officio Secretary of the Parishad.

3. DRDA- the powerful Agency in Rural Development Administration

DRDA has been the principal organ at the district level to oversee the implementation of anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development. This agency was created originally to implement the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Subsequently the DRDAs have been entrusted with number of programmes of both state and central governments. From April 1999 a separate DRDA Administration has been introduced to take care of the administrative costs. This aims at strengthening the DRDAs and makes them more professional in managing the anti-poverty programmes and be an effective link between the ministry and the district administration.

All executive and financial powers of the DRDA are exercised by the Executive Committee, headed by the Chief Executive Officer and comprised of all district level officers and such other officers as considered necessary for planning and implementation of the programmes. This Committee is fully accountable to the Governing Body as well as the Government. As per suggestions of the Central Government, the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad is also the Chairman of the Governing Body in Odisha.

About the role and functions of **the DRDA, the Guidelines on DRDA Administration,** (MoRD, Government of India,2008) states the following:

1. The DRDAs are not the implementing agencies, but can be very effective in enhancing the quality of implementation through overseeing the implementation of different programmes and ensuring that necessary linkages are provided. To this extent the DRDA is a **supporting and a facilitating organisation** and needs to play a very effective role as a catalyst in development process.

2. The District Rural Development Agency is visualised as a **specialised and a professional agency** capable of managing the

anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development on the one hand and to effectively relate these to the overall effort of poverty eradication in the district. It needs to develop distinctive capabilities rather than perform tasks that are legitimately in the domain of the PRIs or the line departments. The role of the DRDA is therefore distinct from all the other agencies, including the Zilla Parishad.

3. DRDAs must themselves be more professional and should be able to interact effectively with various other agencies. They are expected to **coordinate with the line departments**, the Panchayati Raj Institutions, the banks and other financial institutions, the NGOs as well as the technical institutions, with a view to gathering the support and resources required for poverty reduction effort in the district. It shall be their endeavour and objective to secure inter-sectoral and inter-departmental coordination and cooperation for reducing poverty in the district.

4. The DRDAs are expected to **coordinate effectively with the Panchayati Raj** Institutions. Under no circumstances will they perform the functions of PRIs.

5. The DRDAs maintain their separate identity but functions under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad. They are expected to be a facilitating and supporting organisation to the Zilla Parishad, providing necessary executive and technical support in respect of poverty reduction efforts. Wherever the Zilla Parishads are not in existence or are not functional, the DRDAs would function under the Collector /District Magistrate/ Deputy Commissioner, as the case may be.

6. The DRDAs keep the Zilla Parishad, the State and the Central Government duly informed of the progress of the implementation of the programmes through **periodic reports** in the prescribed formats. Special reports, as and when called for, are to be provided.

7. It is the duty of the DRDAs to oversee and ensure that the benefits specifically earmarked for certain target groups (SC/ST, women and disabled) reach them. They are supposed to take all necessary steps to achieve the prescribed norms.

8. The DRDAs take necessary steps to **improve the awareness** regarding rural development and poverty alleviation particularly among the rural poor. This would involve issues of poverty, the opportunities available to the rural poor and generally infusing a sense of

confidence in their ability to overcome poverty. It would also involve sensitising the different functionaries in the district to the different aspects of poverty and poverty alleviation programmes.

9. Keeping in view the substantial investments that are being made in poverty alleviation programmes, the DRDAs are to ensure **financial discipline** in respect of the funds received by them, whether from Central or State Governments. They shall also ensure that the accounts are properly maintained including in respect of the funds allocated to banks or implementing agencies in accordance with the guidelines of different programmes.

10. Thus the role of the DRDA is in terms of **planning for effective implementation** of antipoverty programmes; coordinating with other agencies - Governmental, non-Governmental, technical, and financial for successful programme implementation; enabling the community and the rural poor to participate in the decision making process, overseeing the implementation to ensure adherence to guidelines, quality, equity and efficiency; reporting to the prescribed authorities on the implementation; and promoting transparency in decision making and implementation.

11. The DRDAs deal only with the anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development. If DRDAs are to be **entrusted with programmes of other ministries** or those of the State governments, it should be ensured that these have a definite anti-poverty focus. Entrusting of any programme to the DRDAs, other than anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry, be it of any other Ministry of Government of India or the respective State Government will have to be done with the approval of the Secretary, Rural Development of the respective State(s), who should examine such request in consultation with the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. In such cases, it must be ensured that adequate provision is made for requisite staffing needed for proper implementation of the programme. Accordingly the DRDAs in Odisha are in overall charge of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the rural development programmes.

As per Guidelines on DRDA Administration (MoRD, GoI, 2008) each DRDA is headed by a Project Director, who should be of the rank of an Additional District Magistrate. He is in overall charge of the activities of the DRDA and responsible for interaction with the District/State administration as well as with the Government of

India. The PD should be exclusively for the DRDA work.

In some States such as Maharashtra, the CEO of the Zilla Parishad is the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad. Government of India have suggested to all the State governments that the Chairman, Zilla Parishad should be the Chairman of the governing body of the DRDA. In the light of this, in such states, the CEO of the Zilla Parishad could also be designated as the Project Director of the DRDA. In Odisha the Collector is the CEO of DRDA and the PD, DRDA is the Executive Officer of the DRDA.

Thus at the district level, the presence of DRDA along with Zilla Parishad has resulted in a dichotomy in the way of empowerment of PRIs. The DRDA has emerged as a critical element at the district level and the important agency in the field of rural development administration, thus overshadowing the presence of the district level panchayat, the Zilla Parishad. Hence, following 73rd Amendment Act, the DRDAs should have been disbanded. The Central Government should have taken such a step. But the DRDAs are being flooded with development funds for the districts. The state government has attempted to establish a functional relationship between the DRDAs and ZPs so that both could supervise development activities in the district. The Project Director, DRDA and the Collector respectively are the Executive Officer and Chief Executive Officer of the ZP. So the net result is: the ZPs have become defunct.

4. DRDA needs to be part of Zilla Parishad

With the adoption of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and the underlying mandate for decentralization of powers that privileged those self-government institutions in planning for economic development and social justice, the proposal to re-think the status of DRDAs and also to merge them with the PRI structure had emerged. Under the section on 'devolution of functionaries' the 1st Round Table had adopted a resolution, number IV (i), for re-conceiving the role of District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs). DRDAs were to be progressively merged with the District Panchayats and their technical expertise made available to all tiers of Panchayats.

The Planning Commission had consistently stated that DRDAs should be merged with the District Planning Committees (DPCs) after the passage of the Panchayati Raj Act in 1993, since DRDAs have emerged as a parallel power centre to panchayats. During the UPA-I government, Minister for Panchayati Raj Mani Shankar Aiyar had repeatedly stated

that bodies implementing anti-poverty measures such as DRDAs and units set up to implement other mega social programme such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Rural Health Mission and National Horticulture Mission (NHM), are essentially undermining the role of Panchayats.

At an all India level, the progress so far is not satisfactory. There are some vexed issues, one among which is the 'reported' reluctance on the part of some of the institutions of Union Government for the proposal of merger of DRDAs with the district Panchayats. The complete merger seems to have happened only in Kerala and Karnataka. The latter has a much longer history of doing this. In both the States the DRDAs function as if they were the cells for poverty alleviation / rural development schemes within the Zilla Panchayats.

In 10 States / UTs the DRDAs continue to be separate with the only linkage established with the ZPs is making the President of ZP the Chairperson of the DRDA. These are Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Lakshadweep. In Gujarat the District Development Officer, who is also the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Panchayat, continues to chair the DRDA. In nine States / UTs either the Collector continues as the Chair or some other arrangement has been made in this regard. These are Assam, Goa, Haryana, Jharkhand, Manipur, Tamil Nadu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, and Pondicherry. Andhra Pradesh has made the Zilla Panchayat President the Chair of the DRDA while designating the Collector as the Executive Chairperson. Similarly, in Maharashtra, while the President Zilla Panchayat is made the Chair of the DRDA, the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Panchayat is designated as the Executive Chairman of the Management Committee.

5. The Status in Odisha

The State Government has initiated a move in 2015 for merger of District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) with Zilla Parishad for better management and monitoring of rural development programmes. The recommendation was made by fourth Odisha State Finance Commission as part of institutional and structural strengthening of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) "The Commission feels that the dichotomy in the way of empowerment of the PRIs will come to an end if DRDA is dissolved and its office merges in Zilla Parishad," the Finance panel report said. This will not only convey a determined attitude of the State Government to strengthen the local governance, but also inspire the line departments to realign their

schemes, programmes and administrative structure in tandem with the new reality, the report said. But no further initiative has been taken for the integration of the DRDA into Zilla Parishad by the Odisha government.

6. Conclusion:

Considering the significance attached to the empowerment of the PRIs by the 73rd Amendment Act and by various governments it is quite logical to be concerned about the insignificant and minimal role being assigned to the Zilla Parishad by various state governments including Odisha. Zilla Parishad, being an elected body should have been adequately empowered to play a vital role in local governance and rural development administration. This can be possible only when the DRDA is integrated into Zilla Parishad and functions under it. As a matter of fact, the integration will reduce administrative expenditure, besides giving an opportunity to the elected representatives to monitor the rural development programmes. Further, the problem of dichotomy of empowerment will be resolved and the Zilla Parishad will be empowered. For this to happen, it is highly desirable that the Central Government take the initiative instead of leaving the matter to the states. State governments should also exhibit the political will and enact legislations to ensure better functional relationship between the DRDA and Zilla Parishad within the PRI architecture.

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Pregnancy and Pandemic Management at Household Level in India: COVID-19 Perspective

Sujata Verma, V V Kulkarni

Introduction:

Government of India adopted the Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) framework in 2013. During COVID-19 pandemic this is very much essential and aims to address the major causes of mortality and morbidity among women and children not only at the health facility but at household level also.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India has launched a new initiative namely- SUMAN "Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan" with an aim to provide 'assured, dignified, respectful and quality healthcare at no cost. and zero tolerance for denial of services to any woman and new born visiting the public health facility in order to end all preventable maternal and new born deaths and morbidities and provide, a positive birthing experience'. The expected outcome of this new initiative is 'Zero preventable maternal and new born deaths and high quality of maternity care delivered with dignity and respect'.

According to the latest figure released by Registrar General of India - Sample Registration System (RGI-SRS) Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) for the period 2014-16 is 130 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. With this, India has achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 i.e. India have achieved a reduction in MMR by three quarters between 1990 and 2015. The target was to achieve 139 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.

In the context of COVID-19, pregnant women should not appear more likely to contract the infection than the general population (ICMR, India). However, pregnancy itself alters the body's immune system and response to viral infections in general, which can occasionally be related to

more severe symptoms and this will be the same for COVID-19. The coronavirus epidemic increases the risk of perinatal anxiety and depression, as well as domestic violence. It is critically important that support for women and families is strengthened as far as possible; that women are asked about mental health during every contact.

Objectives: Following are the key objectives to understand pregnancy management at household level pre and post COVID-19

- To increase the early ANC registration by family due to COVID-19 pandemic during lockdown and unlock period in India.
- To ensure 3 or more than 3 ANCs to all the expectant mothers and special attention to high risk pregnancies during lockdown.
- To decrease the incidence and progress of anaemia in pregnant and lactating women.
- Provide adequate opportunities for safe deliveries and to increase institutional deliveries.
- To improve the coverage of post-partum care at household level.
- To increase access to Emergency Obstetric Care for complicated deliveries through strengthening of family care.
- To reduce Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) during COVID-19 pandemic in India.

Main Findings: Strategy for Pregnancy Management

Family care providers should create a plan to address the possibility of a decreased health care workforce, potential shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), limited isolation rooms, and should maximize the use of tele health across as many aspects of prenatal care as possible. Each household should consider its appropriate space and essential needs to prevent transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19. Pregnant women should be advised to increase their social distancing to reduce the risk of infection and practice hand hygiene.

Specific Medical history- All pregnant women should maintain following information:

- A detailed travel history of all household members /visitors
- History of exposure to people with symptoms of COVID-19
- Symptoms of COVID-19
- Any contact with persons coming from hot spot area

- Immuno compromised conditions

Antenatal Care- Women should be advised to attend routine antenatal care, tailored to minimum of 12, 20, 28 and 36 weeks of gestation, in consultation with the maternal care provider, unless they meet current self-isolation criteria. During COVID-19 pandemic, delivery should be preferably at tertiary care centre. Maternal observations including temperature, respiratory rate & oxygen saturations should be monitored daily at home care.

Daily respiratory rate-Young fit women can compensate for deterioration in respiratory function and are able to maintain normal oxygen saturations before they suddenly decompensate. So, a rise in the respiratory rate, even if the saturations are normal, may indicate deterioration in respiratory function and should be managed by starting or increasing oxygen. Hourly observations, monitoring both the absolute values and the trends to check titrate oxygen to keep saturations >94%. If a woman tests positive, she should be advised to deliver at least at an FRU(First referral unit) or SDH (Rural Sub Divisional Hospital); preferably a tertiary facility anticipating the complications during delivery.

Radiographic investigations should be performed as for any non-pregnant adult; this includes chest X-ray and CT of the chest. Chest imaging, especially CT chest, is essential for the evaluation of the patient with COVID-19 and should be performed when indicated, and not delayed due to foetal concerns. Abdominal shielding can be used to protect the foetus as per normal protocols.

Postnatal Management- It is unknown whether new-borns with COVID-19 are at increased risk for severe complications. Transmission after birth via contact with infectious respiratory secretions is a concern. At home family should consider temporarily separating (e.g. separate room) the mother who has confirmed COVID-19 from her baby until the mother's transmission-based precautions are discontinued.

Breastfeeding- During temporary separation, mothers who intend to breastfeed should be encouraged to express their breast milk to establish and maintain milk supply. If possible, a dedicated breast pump should be provided. Prior to expressing breast milk, mothers should practice hand hygiene. After each pumping session, all parts that come into contact with breast milk should be thoroughly washed and the entire pump should be appropriately disinfected as per the manufacturer's instructions. This expressed breast milk should be fed to the new-born by a healthy caregiver. If a mother and new-born do room-in and

the mother wishes to feed at the breast, she should put on a facemask and practice hand hygiene before each feeding.

The decision to discontinue temporary separation of the mother from her baby should be made on a case-by-case basis in consultation with clinicians, infection prevention and control specialists, and public health officials. Decision should take into account disease severity, illness signs and symptoms, and results of laboratory testing for virus that causes COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2 of mother and neonate. Consider using engineering controls like physical barriers (e.g., a curtain between the mother and new-born) and keeping the new-born ≥6 feet away from the ill mother.

Hospital Discharge- Discharge for postpartum women should follow recommendations described in the guidelines for discharge of hospitalized patients with COVID-19. Test should be negative and maternal and foetal/neonatal condition should be stable

Personal Protection Equipment for Management of Mother or Child during COVID-19

These are needed when performing caring procedure or in an area where neonates are being provided support by care taker:

- ✓ Eye protection / Goggles (will not be usable by those using vision glasses) or face shield.
- ✓ Body protection / Long-sleeved water-resistant complete gown including head and shoe cover.
- ✓ A single piece head to toe water resistant body cover will be ideal for attending in delivery room or OT.
- ✓ Hand protection / Well-fitting gloves
- ✓ Respiratory protection-triple layered surgical mask/N95 facemasks
- ✓ The number of persons in the home should be kept to a minimum, and all must wear appropriate mask.

Summary and Conclusion:

COVID-19 infection during pregnancy may result in rapid deterioration of health of pregnant women and could also affect the child. Experts are of the view that the benefits of vaccination to the pregnant women outweigh its potential risks. Based on the recommendations from National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI), MoHFW has approved vaccination of pregnant women against COVID-19 with the condition that the pregnant women may be informed about the risks of

exposure to COVID-19 infection along with the risks and benefits associated with the COVID-19 vaccines available in the country. Based on the information provided, a pregnant woman can exercise her choice (MOHFW, 2021).

Pregnancy does not increase the risk to COVID-19 infection, but current evidence indicate that pregnant women are at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared to non-pregnant women in case they get infected. Additionally, pregnant women with COVID-19 are at increased risk for preterm birth and might have an increased risk of other adverse pregnancy outcomes including higher chances of neonatal morbidity. Most pregnant women will be asymptomatic or have mild disease, but their health may deteriorate rapidly and that might affect the foetal outcome. It is important that they take all precautions to protect themselves from COVID-19.

WHO recommends vaccination in pregnant women when the benefits of vaccination to the pregnant woman outweigh the potential risks, such as pregnant women at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 and pregnant women with co-morbidities that place them in a high-risk group for severe COVID-19 disease.

Improving Maternal Health is one of the SDG targets and a vital component towards achieving Continuum of Care. India has made considerable progress over the last decade in Maternal and Child Health by providing accessible quality health services especially for rural areas, difficult-to-reach areas and to the poor. This improvement in reduction can be attributed to various schemes of Government of India such as Mamta Diwas, 108 ambulances, improvement in government facilities and quality, continuous tracking of pregnant mothers through E-Mamta, PMSMA Yojana, Poshan Yojana, and free drop back to home after institutional delivery.

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Tribes and Traditions of North-east India: A Bird's Eye View

Jayanti Dora, Kamalakanta Behera

Abstract

The North East of India, situated in the eastern most region, is one of the country's most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse areas. In the present research attempt, ethno-historical assessments have been made, keeping in view some of the major tribes settled in the states of the North-Eastern Region of India. This includes tribes like Adi, Apatani, Angami, Sumi, Reang, Chakma, Jamatai, Uchai, Morasing, Mog, Garo, Mizo, Bodo etc settled in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram in Northeast India. Here an attempt has been made to study their language, fairs and festivals, costumes, diet, occupation, lifestyle, values, customs, traditions, and overall social structure.

Keywords: *Ethnohistory, linguistics, North-Eastern Region (NER), Tribes, Customs , Traditions,*

Introduction

The North-eastern part of India has its vast and varied ranges of picturesque, mysterious forests, and numerous small and large rivers including the Brahmaputra on its lap. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim are the states that make up Northeast India. They are part of the East Himalayan region, which stretches eastward from Sikkim and includes West Bengal's Darjeeling Hills. Divided into eight states, this region of India is rich and unequalled in terms of natural beauty and wealth. The region is known for its rich ecosystems, heavy rainfall, and severe seismicity. It has ample natural resources and is well-suited for growing a variety of crops, spices, fruits and vegetables, as well as flowers and herbs. The area's exquisite natural beauty, serenity, and rare flora and fauna are priceless assets.

The North-eastern part of India is one of the country's most ethnically and linguistically diverse areas. A large number of tribes inhabit this region and each tribe has its own distinct customs, traditions, culture, art and craft, fairs and festivals, dance, music, and different way of life. Naturally, being equipped with as many tribal cultures, artworks and language, this region is a centre of attraction for lovers of art, literature, culture, and nature. Most of these tribes are settled in the rugged forests, inaccessible valleys, hills and rivers of the North-east and are considered as descendants of the Mongol family. Numerous Mongol tribes of the Chinese-Tibetan and Tibetan-Burmese race are spread throughout this region. Mongolian natives who speak regional dialects of the Chinese-Tibetan language family are settled in Assam, North Bengal, North Bihar and the Himalayan regions of India. The Tibeto-Burmese Mongol tribes extend westward from the Brahmaputra and some are located in the mountainous regions of Assam. Some Indian Mongol tribes are also found in Assam. The Naga and Kuki tribes settled in Manipur are also associated with the Tibeto-Burmese group.

The existence of numerous tribes in Indian society, their art and crafts, customs and traditions, religion and rituals and their way of living are all part of our cultural heritage. History is witness to the fact that many human races of the world developed in a very sophisticated manner but in doing so their primitive races have become extinct or are on the verge of extinction in the modern era. However, Indian primitive tribal communities kept themselves alive under adverse conditions. The study of these tribal communities in the context of history is a need of modern society.

Arunachal Pradesh

Located in the north-eastern part of India, around 70% of Arunachal Pradesh is covered by the Himalayan mountain ranges. There are many big rivers like Siang, Lohit, Diwang, Kameng, Tirap, and Diding and this state is home to many tribes. In this state Nyishi, Adi, Gallo, Apatani, Mompa, Taigin, Sherdukpen Mishmi, Khamati, Singpho, Naqte, Wangchu, Tangsa, Aaka, Mizi, Memba, Bugun etc. are some of the major tribes. The socio-cultural structure of these tribes is different. Due to the lack of uniformity in the dialects of these tribes, none of their languages became popular as a communication language. Therefore, Hindi and Assamese languages have become the medium of communication in this state.

Adi Tribe:

The Adi tribe of Arunachal is one of the major tribes of the state. Many sub-tribes of this group are also found.

Social and cultural unity is also visible among the sub-tribes of this clan. The Adis reside in five districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Adi society is a male-dominated society. In patriarchal tradition, descent from father goes on, but the importance of mother's role is also not reduced. Women of this society are equally respected as men. In this society, only a son is entitled to the paternal property. Daughters are given precious bead garlands, brass utensils and domesticated female animals at the time of their marriage. In the Adi society both joint and nuclear families are found. As the family grows, the son, along with his family, separates. Land and the property is divided equally among sons, but the home and warehouse are considered as the rights of the younger son. Adi society is an extended and orderly society. There is no discrimination of any kind in this society. 'Kebang' is established as the supreme organization at the centre of this society, which is synonymous with one type of panchayat. 'Kebang' is a political, social and cultural organization of the Adis. This tribal society of North-east resolves all the issues in 'Kebang' itself. So there is nothing more than 'Kebang' for them (Danggen, 2003).'Musup' is another important organization in the Adi society. The youth of this society reside in the Musup from childhood to puberty and get their primary moral and practical education from there. This is a kind of ashram, which is situated outside the village and imparts education to the youth to make them disciplined.

The main occupation of this tribe is agriculture. These people mainly grow rice, maize, millet, tuber-root and green vegetables; rice is especially loved by them. Their cultivation is called 'Jhum cultivation'. It is a form of shifting cultivation and is also known as slash and burn cultivation which is temporary in nature. Women and men work equally in the fields, but their job is divided according to the nature of work. Tribal society is a festive society, hence, they celebrate many festivals throughout the year. Unyod-Aran, Etor, Solung and Pimen are important festivals. All their festivals are related to agriculture and nature. 'Unyid-Aran' festival is a festival celebrated as New Year before starting farming. In this festival, small creatures are hunted and the young people perform traditional songs. In 'Solung' women dance Ponung and this festival is celebrated with great pomp and pleasure. The Pimen festival is celebrated when the first crop of paddy arrives. In this, the goddess of food is thanked with song and dance. Adi society is a nature worshipping society. They are worshipers of Donyi-Polo i.e Sun and Moon, hence their religion is also called 'Donyi-Polo Jam'. Which is a form of Sanatana Dharma. Today, forty percent of the population has converted to Christianity. (Nyori,1993)

Apatani Tribe:

Apatani Valley is situated in the heart of the Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. The tribes living in the Apatani Valley are known as Apatani. The Apatani tribe differs in many respects from their neighbouring tribes. There are traditionally seven large villages in the tranquil valley of Apatani and there are many castes and tribes in each village. Their physique is characterized by fair complexion, medium and long stature, slightly curly and erect hair, raised cheekbones, and double folded eyelids, of their Indo-mongolian race. These people are permanent settlers of Arunachal, and are extremely careful, cautious and have strong faith in cultural and religious beliefs. The traditional and social structure of Apatani is determined according to their human values and norms. Family is the principal unit of social life in the village of Apatani tribe, where grandparents, parents and children live together, but parents and other unmarried children have to leave their ancestral home as soon as the elder son gets married. After the marriage of the elder son, the unmarried children and their parents immediately move into the new house. If they do not have another house, then they go and live in the backyard of the same house. But these two families living together under one roof is not considered respectable in the society. Therefore, these people buy a plot of land and a warehouse for each boy. All the property of ancestors and all the belongings of the house are given to the elder son. The newly acquired assets are distributed among the younger sons. According to the Apatani tradition, daughters have to marry and go to their husband's house and stay as a member of their household. Daughters do not get any share in the property, they are given beads inherited from their ancestors by their grandmother or mother. The younger sisters are given newly acquired beads.

In all their seven large villages, the traditional pre-marital relationship is recognized, but mutual relations with anyone outside the tribe or any other tribe are not accepted in the Apatani marriage practice. Occasionally, sexual relations are also socially acceptable, but this is not acceptable between a married and unmarried couple or between blood relations. In Apatani society there is neither custom of marriage in the same clan (gotra) nor relationship with married women. Marriage among relatives is forbidden. If a man does not have children from the first wife and his financial condition is eligible for shelter to the second wife, then he can marry the second with the permission of the first wife. The inner and outer peace and harmony in the society is established due to the existence of 'bulliang'. He is

the supreme officer of the social, political and judicial system of the Apatanis. He is considered a very respectable person in Apatani society. They are rich, politically qualified and capable individuals who are adept in tribal rules. People respect them and follow the decisions made by them. Their traditional economic system is a self-sufficient village economy. The source of their economy is agriculture. These people do not do agriculture by burning forests or changing places. Their farming arrangements and residences are always of permanent nature. Apart from agriculture, businesses like hunting, fishing, weaving, cane and bamboo work, animal husbandry, poultry farming are helpful in maintaining their economic condition. Their fields are very fertile, being on the flat land of the valley, they grow ample amounts of crops every year. Due to the proper use of the natural resources, their tribe is economically independent. Their religious system is completely guided by priests. The priest is considered to be full of all kinds of spiritual and supernatural knowledge and ideas. They consider Abotani as their ancestor. According to their myths, Abotani was the first man on earth; he had to face many kinds of sufferings due to invisible and mysterious powers. Being considered his children, there is a belief among the Apatani that they are also harassed by the invisible gods and goddesses in life. They also have good deities who give happiness and prosperity and also bad deities that give deadly diseases and sufferings. They are offered animals, poultry, eggs, etc. through Apatani priests to get them treated and provide protection. (Haimendorf, 1962)

Nagaland

Nagaland, bordering the international border between India and Myanmar, is also a land of amazing natural beauty and a distinct society and culture. The Dhansiri and Doyang rivers adorn this region covered with forests. Today people have many misconceptions about Nagaland. People here are still considered to be extremely primitive and rebellious. Nagaland has been known for its headhunting tradition, but this tradition is completely over now. (Drouyer 2016). A total of sixteen tribes reside in Nagaland. These are known as Aao, Angami, Kuki, Konyak, Chakhesang, Zeliang, Khiamniungan, Kachari, Fuchori, Chang, Foam, Lotha, Rengma, Sumi, Sangatam and Yimchunger. In this, the 'Khyamungam' caste considers themselves to be native of Nagaland while other tribes consider themselves as migrant Mongolians. These tribes arrived in India via Central Asia and Burma to settle in Nagaland, Manipur,

and Mizoram. The tribes of almost the whole of Nagaland follow Christianity. The tribes of this place wear shawls with special weaving and colors (Wettstein, 2014) which makes their identification easy. Jhum farming is their prime means of earning livelihood. These people also specialize in artistic works like making bamboo baskets, carving wood, pottery, and making tools. The head of the village has a special place among the tribes of Nagaland, yet all decisions related to society and the village are taken collectively. Like the Adi tribes, there is a tradition among these tribes of residing in the 'Morang' to keep the youth trained and disciplined. Being a hilly region, they do jhum farming on the slopes of the mountains. Every year, fresh forests are cleared and fields are prepared on the slopes of the mountains. They do not use any kind of tools for farming. Once they cultivate a field, they do not re-cultivate it for some years in order to keep the soil fertile in the natural way. The right of the person who cultivates the land is accepted there. These people mainly grow rice, maize, fruits, and vegetables. Naga people eat all kinds of meat with great passion. Naga men still carry sickle and spears in their hands. A Naga woman carries a 'khang' (basket) with her, that is, the job of women is to carry the burden. This basket can be seen with her throughout her life. Nagas are linguistically sound. Nagameez' is their native tongue. Nagas have begun to study Hindi and English in recent years.

Angami:

The Angami Tribe is a prominent tribal group in Nagaland. Almost, all of them reside in different parts of Kohima. The Angami Nagas are a hill tribe that subsists primarily on agriculture and livestock. The Angamis are well-known for their terraced wet-rice farming. In the month of February, the Angamis observe Sekrenyi Festival, also known as Phousanyi, which is a ten-day festival to celebrate harvest. The word 'Sekrenyi' basically means 'sanctification festival'. The Angami men don shawls, and the women wear Mechala, which is a wrap-around skirt with colorful designs and patterns. Beads, pendants, bangles, and bracelets are worn by both men and women, and they are all stunningly gorgeous. Woodwork, bamboo weaving, bamboo furniture, and handmade shawls are all common among Angamis. Pottery and basket weaving are Angami women's crafts. Among the Angamis, pork with bamboo shoots is a common dish. Historically, Angamis were fighters. With the arrival of Christianity in the area, many Angamis converted to Christianity, and inter-village conflicts, as well as head hunting traditions disappeared completely. Despite the fact that more than 98

percent of Angamis are Christians, they are one of Nagaland's few animism-practicing tribes. Music is an important part of their culture, and the drum and flute are among their most common instruments, which are used in many of their ceremonies and festivals. (Lanunungsang,2013)

Sumi Tribe:

The Sumis are primarily found in the Zunheboto district of Nagaland, though some have dispersed to other areas of the state. They are famous for being one of the most organized and violent tribes, but given their viciousness and violent attitude in battle, they are also renowned for their simplicity and integrity; and their allegiance to their tribesmen and associates is unsurpassed. The Sumis have several festivities to commemorate the start of new seasons, the harvesting of new crops, and war victories.

Tuluni and Ahuna are the two main festivals. Tuluni, which takes place on July 8th, is a significant Sumi festival. This festival is characterised by community feasts since it falls during the year's most productive season. For the Sumi culture, this midyear festival is a time of social prosperity and celebration. Pigs and cows are slaughtered as part of this festival. The Sumis' annual post-harvest festival, Ahuna, takes place on November 14th and on that day, the whole community cooks and eats the first meal of the season, which is rice cooked in bamboo pieces to celebrate the season's first harvest. Ahuna is now observed as a significant community event with a range of diverse programs such as local songs and dances, traditional sports and cultural competitions, as well as haute cuisine. (Hutton,1921)

Tripura

Nineteen tribes of Mongol family are also found in Tripura. These tribes are Tripuri (Debbarma) Riang, Jamatia, Noatia, Murasing, Uchai, Kalai, Rupini, Chakma, Garo, Mong, Lushai, Dalang., Known as Malasum, Kaipeng, Rakhol, Halaam, Kuki, Munda, Lepcha. Their language is called 'Tripuri'. However, their main languages are Cockabarak and Bangla. The family structure of all the tribes of Tripura is patriarchal. Single families are very common in Tripura. In the family the father is the head of the household. All the decisions of the family are taken under the supervision of the father. Women also have a respectable place in these tribes. Women are in charge of all household chores, while men are in charge of outside work, however women also support their men in agriculture related activities. Marriage is an important religious celebration of these tribes. Marriages are decided by keeping in view social and economic equality.

Marriages are usually done in one's own tribe. There are four types of marriages in vogue. The marriage arranged by the parents, the marriage done by the boy by staying at the girl's house and pleasing them with the service, the bride-price marriage and the runaway marriage. Religiously, the tribes here are divided into Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian religions. Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Uchai and Mog are the major tribes here. (Chaudhury, 2004)

Reang Tribe:

The Reang tribe is also known by the name 'Bru'. The Reang Tribe loves festivals. Buisu, Gariyan and Hojaigiri are their main festivals. Apart from these, festivals like Hongrai, Myluma - Khuluma are also celebrated by them. Their major occupation is agriculture. Rice and cotton are their main crops. For the protection of their agricultural crops they worship goddesses associated with agriculture like Minaukma (goddess of stock), Myluma (goddess of paddy) and 'Khuluma' (goddess of cotton) for protection. Death rites are also celebrated in this tribe as a big event. Dead bodies are bathed in warm water, dressed in new clothes and placed in the canopy for darshan. All the visitors donate money, eggs and liquor as a form of tribute to the deceased person. It is believed that the deceased who gets donated more money has more fame. The women of the house cook food in the name of the deceased and serve the whole in a plate. The next day some people go to the crematorium and arrange for wood. Five-layer pyre is made for dead men and seven for women. While carrying the dead body to the crematorium, dhol and flute are played and people dance before it. (Gan-Chaudhuri, 1980)

Jamatia Tribe:

In terms of population, the place of the Jamatia tribe comes after the Reang. People of this tribe are found in Udaipur, Sonapura, Bilonia, Amarpur, Kailash town and Khevai. The people of this tribe are believed to have previously worked in the King's military department. Later the military department came to be called Jamatia, which signifies the clan and gotra for this tribe. Their main livelihood is agriculture. Goriya Puja, which lasts for seven days, is their main worship. Apart from this, almost all Hindu deities are also worshiped here, for the protection of family, for economic prosperity, for personal safety and for protection from evil. Bride-value marriage is not prevalent in this community. After marriage, the woman keeps a social distance from her husband's elder brothers, and the male from his wife's elder sisters. If they touch each other at a social place, the relationship is sanctified by giving a bottle of wine to the people present there.

Chakma Tribe:

The Chakmas are also a Mongolian tribe. Their language is a confluence of the Indio-Aryan languages. Chakma people consider themselves descendants of Mahatma Buddha. Each Chakma village has a leader who is called 'Karbari' or 'Dewan'. Since ancient times, the Chakmas have been following the rituals with full readiness to keep their tribe united. In this tribe, the village head is invited in every ritual, from the discussion for the marriage of a boy or a girl. The invitation includes a bottle of wine and betel nut. After this, it becomes the responsibility of the village head to get that marriage conducted properly.

A good sample of social organization can be seen here. If ever a weak family faces any problem in the work of jhum farming, then it goes to the village head for help. At the behest of the village head, one member of each family of the Chakma tribe works in the farm of the weaker person to help him. Here, whenever a woman gives birth to a child, the women of each family in the village tie rice and nutritious vegetables in a banana leaf and give it to her as a gift to the newborn. Every year the people of the village go to the nearby river and worship it for the happiness, peace and protection of the village. This annual puja is called 'Thanmana'. During this puja, every villager contributes to the puja according to his ability.

Uchai Tribe:

The Uchai tribe first used to live in Burma, Tibet and Sian district of China. It is a Buddhist tribe, the main occupation being farming and hunting of wild animals. Earlier they used to build houses on trees, later settled on the banks of the Karnaphuli River in Tripura and Bangladesh due to search for work and other reasons. Their number is very small. Many of their customs differ from other tribes of Tripura. At the time of the birth of a child, for the welfare of this child, the priest goes to the river bank and sacrifices three chickens in the name of three different deities. Similarly, if a person dies, his dead body is bathed and purified. They sing and dance near the dead body at night. Those who come to the funeral donate money as per their capacity in a plate placed near the feet of the dead body. After the funeral, his family members are required to arrange a mass feast. A unique ritual of marriage is found amongst them. The groom, wearing his ethnic turban and self-made clothes, waits for the bride in a room, while the bride sits hidden in another room. The bride's brother-in-law and other relatives find her and make her sit near the groom. Then the priest comes and places his hand on their head, blesses them and pours water. They are then forcibly made to sleep together and covered with a cloth. Four people hold them from all four corners and tease

them both by clapping. After this, the head of the Uchai tribe blesses them and pours water on their heads. Thereafter, both of them become husband and wife. Main pujas are organized here twice a year. In this, one worship is done by considering the largest tree in the mountain as Shiva and the other as Ganga Mata on the banks of the river. Nowadays this tribe has turned to Christianity in large numbers.

Murasing Tribe:

Murasing is one of the endangered tribes in Tripura today. These tribes introduce themselves with the surnames Debbarma, Noatia, Tripura, etc. There are many types of stories about the origin of this tribe. Some consider them to be related to Jhum farming, some to a tribe living in the forest who decorate their house with the heads of hunting animals. A unique practice prevails in this tribe. Unless a young man desirous of marriage cuts a banana tree with a single blow of his left hand, he is not considered marriageable. There are two types of cremation here. If the deceased is a vegetarian, they bury him and place a basil leaf on his head. If he has been a non-vegetarian then he is cremated.

Mog Tribe:

The Mog tribe is very small in numbers. The physical formation of these people resembles those of the Mongol race. Like other hill tribes, jhum farming is also their main occupation. Before cultivation, the family members clean a part of the forest by picking or burning it. Then the land is worshiped. On the day when all this happens, if a family member has any nightmare related to land or farming, then they do not cultivate that place, after which they have to search for a new place according to the rules and then the same process is repeated.

Like other tribes, cottage industries are prevalent in Mog as well. In Tripura, bamboo has a lot of significance; many valuable items and household items are made from bamboo by them. It is believed that if a mog boy is not skilled in bamboo crafts, it is impossible for him to get a good girl. 'Mog' women are adept in the craft of weaving clothes. Earlier, when this tribe depended only on jhum agriculture, the clothes of people were also woven with jhum cotton. Mog women even weave the clothes of Buddhist monks; this tradition was prevailing until the cloth from commercial arrived. Hence, the weaving craft is a historical heritage of the 'Mog' tribe. Many rules of birth, death and marriage of these tribes are similar to Hindus, especially to Bengali Hindus. For example the new-born child stays in the maternal house for a month, then after worship, the child enters the native house; after death the body of a person is cremated,

etc. There are some rules of their own which they have been following since ancient times, like playing the drum at the house of the deceased and keeping the deceased till all the kith and keen can see his mortal remains. The idea behind playing drums is that people of distant places should get information about the death. There are two methods of marriage prevalent in them. One, the marriage is arranged by the parents and in another by the boy who goes to the girl's house and makes her family happy with his service.

Manipur

Manipur is surrounded by Nagaland to the North, Mizoram to the South, Assam to the West, and Myanmar to the East. Imphal is the capital of Manipur. There are four major tribal groups in Manipur. The valley is home to the Meitei tribe and the Bishnupriya Manipuri tribe whereas the Naga and Kuki tribes live in Manipur's hilly terrain. These major tribes incorporate several sub-tribes like Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chote, Gangte, Hamar, Kabui, Kachnaga, Kairao, Koirang, Kom, Lamgung, Mao, Maram, Maring, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Sabte, Tangkhul, Thadou, Vaifa and Zoe. Given their socio-political and linguistic differences, all ethnic tribes are descendants of the same Mongoloid family, and their cultures are identical.

Meitei:

The Meiteis are predominantly found in the Imphal Valley area of present Manipur, though a substantial population has also settled in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram; with a significant presence in Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Meitei tribal community makes up roughly 53% of Manipur's total population. (Singh Khomdan). Meitei people speak meiteilon or manipuri language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group. It is believed that the word Meitei is derived from 'Mitei' meaning "modeled in God's image". (Tarapot, 2003). The Meiteis have contributed immensely to enrich the culture of Manipur. The popular Manipuri dance form owes its origins to the Meitei dance form Lai Haraoba. The origin of the traditional martial art of Manipur known as Thang-Ta can also be traced back to Meitei knights. They also introduced polo to the western world which was traditionally played as "Sagol Kangjei". The Meitei use a traditional calendar known as the Maliyafam Palcha Kumsing, which like the Gregorian calendar, has 12 months and seven days in a week. Both Hinduism and Sanamahi religious traditions are practised by Meiteis. They worship Sanamahi, in the South-west corners of their houses. Rasalila, Janmastami, Holi, Lai Haraoba, Cheiraoba, Yaosang, Jagannath Rath Yatra, Diwali, Ram Navami, and other

festivals are celebrated with great joy by Meiteis. The Meiteis cremate the deceased person and believe that his soul will be sanctified and will return to 'Koburu', the place where Meiteis believe that humans have originated.

The Meitei are primarily farmers who grow rice as a staple crop. Mangoes, lemons, pineapples, bananas, guavas, and other fruits are also grown. Fishing is another prime occupation among the Meitei, which can be done professionally or recreationally. Meat, textiles, and traditional clothes are usually sold by women in local markets. (Winston, 2004). The ethnic wear of Meitei women is dominated by 'Phanek' which is a large tube of fabric wrapped around the body and has horizontal striped patterns or single block colour. Embroidery is done to embellish the ends and is typically worn with a blouse and an enaphi, which is similar to a dupatta but is usually translucent.

Despite the fact that landforms and the number of tribes divide Manipur geographically and politically, the shared culture practised by various tribes, such as the food they consume, the prime reason for the festivals they observe, and the vibrant colours in the clothes they wear, has a strong unifying effect. It is fascinating to see how so many tribes can coexist with so much similarity, yet standing out in some way. As a result, it is no surprise that Manipur is known as the 'Land of the Jewels'.

Meghalaya

Khasi, Jaintia, and Boro tribes are predominantly found in the beautiful mountains of Meghalaya. The Khasi and Jaintia tribes are considered descendants of the first group of Mongols who arrived in India. The Garo tribe lives in the Garo Hills region, which has a population of close to one million. These tribes like to call themselves 'Aa Chik Mande'. Which literally means 'man of the mountain'. From the point of view of folk traditions, it is a characteristic feature of the tribes of Meghalaya that the matriarchal tradition prevails there from time immemorial. Therefore, children are identified by their mother's name. The father is the head of the household, but women also have equal social rights as men and women are also heard in family issues. People of the Khasi tribe believe in the omnipresence of God. According to them, there are three orders of God - be virtuous, know man and God, and obey your parents and relatives. Their lineage runs according to the tradition from mother to daughter. These people consider the raising of the daughter as a blessing from God. They do not have a theistic place of worship, their God prevails everywhere and they worship God anywhere, in and outside the house. Khasi people believe that after

death, their soul flies to God with wings; then the body is purified with fire and then returns to the mother earth. (Larington Kharkongngor, 1973)

Garo Tribe:

The Garo language originates from Cachari, a subdivision of the Tibet-Burmese branch. Some linguists consider Cockabarak, Bodo, Kuki, Chinese as the branches of the Garo language. But there are many variations on the level of words and pronunciation in the Garo language of Tripura as compared with Bangladeshi Garo, Assamese Garo and Meghalayi Garo. Some customs of the Garo society correspond to other societies. This tribe was originally Hindu, although nowadays, attraction towards Christianity is being seen.

Like other tribes of Meghalaya, the Garo tribe also has a matriarchal system. Under this arrangement, women have the right to property, that is, from mother to daughter. People of the Garo tribe have a sense of loyalty and faith towards their social system. Like other tribes, these people also love to sing and celebrate festivals. In this tribe, songs are sung at every stage of the process of jhum cultivation. 'Wangala' is their main festival which is celebrated in the autumn. In this festival, the elders of the village sing songs and dance to the beat of drummers, moving from house to house in an atmosphere of ecstasy and zeal. In this festival Katta Doka (tribal rapping), Ajia, Dani Doka (describing Wangala by singing), Chambil Mesaa or the Pomelo Dance are performed. In this festival the young men and women meet informally or choose a life partner for marriage (Paulinas, 2005).

Mizoram

'Mizoram' literally means the land of the people who live in the mountains. Their language is 'Lushei' meaning Mizo language. Lushei, Ralte, Haar, Paite and Poi are the five main tribes in this region. This tribe has a place called 'Jolbak' for the virgins; this place is run under the patronage of the head of the village. But here they are not near the outskirts of the village, but in the middle of the village, near the chief's house. Before marriage, all the young people come and sleep here at night and observe the rites of their society. According to a research, 'Jeollabuk' was actually an outstanding institution of Mizo society which played a successful role in nurturing their lifestyle. On the one hand, where it saved the society from interfering in small things, i.e., the policy of non-conformity and subtle laissez-faire, on the other hand it instilled in them a deep love for freedom and true love and respect for the social organization built on the basis of communal relationship.

'Mizo village is like a big family. The village head is the father and ruler of the village. Mass feast is organized on occasions like births, deaths, and marriages. A sense of service and sacrifice is paramount among the people of the village. These people also welcome the strangers with great affinity and hospitality. According to the old religious principles, the Mizo people believe in a supreme power. This power is above all humans. Prayers have special importance in their life. On birth, engagement, marriage ceremony and other special occasions, sacrifices are held to pay gratitude. Chapchar Kut, Mimku and Pol Koot are their main festivals. These festivals are celebrated on three major stages of farming. The 'Chapchar Koot' festival is celebrated in spring in the courtyard of the village headman. In this festival, the youth of the village hold the shoulders of each other and dance. Polkut is a festival celebrated by women during the harvest of paddy and mimkut is celebrated in the fall. The Mizo people have been music lovers since ancient times. The song is as important for them as the soul for the body. Mizo's life is incomplete without music. The Mizo people have had their own special tunes since ancient times. These people can sing from the depths of the heart throughout the night without any instrument. They are proud of their folk songs and folk dances. Their songs and dance forms have evolved along with nature. Mizo society is a male dominated society. In this society, the youngest son of the family is the heir of movable and immovable property. The responsibility of serving parents in old age rests with the younger son. In this society, the dead body is buried in the crematorium. For about a week, the family sings a consolation song called Khohar Wha for the deceased. (Nunthara,1996).

Assam

Confluence of various tribes also appears in Assam. People of different tribes have lived in Assam since ancient times. Most of the tribes in Assam are believed to be of Mongol descent. These include tribes like Rabha, Kachari, Garo, Tiwa, Mishing, and Kabi. No wonder, this state has been dubbed as 'India in miniature' because of its large number of ethnic and linguistic communities as well as demographic composition.

Rabha Tribe:

One of the major tribes of Assam is Rabha tribe. The Rabha community is divided into several categories. Of these, only three categories - Rangdani, Maitari and Koch have been able to preserve their language and culture. (Basumatary, 2010). The Rabha tribe is culturally rich. The "Barai" system is prevalent in the Rabha community. Barai means gotra which is related to

matriarch in Rabha community. Mother's gotra is the gotra of children. The father's progeny bears the title of mother at the time of property division. Both the parents have been given equal status in the social structure and both have equal importance in the society. Like the Khasi community, the place of women in the Rabha community is not paramount, yet women have been given an equal place. Different forms of marriage are prevalent in the Rabha community. Nok-dhankay is a form of love marriage; Buri tshinkay is a traditionally arranged marriage by parental negotiation; Krantshi buri is a marriage ceremony without feasting; Saja biya is a marriage by negotiation; Gharjai biya is a marriage by elopement. Recently, there have been more marriages beyond one's tribe, and there has been a gradual approval for this. However, marriage in the same gotra is considered taboo. People of this community worship various deities. Their main goddess is believed to be Bykho. Bykho Devi has been worshiped since primitive age as the presiding deity of Shakti. Rabha people also worship Rantak (Lakshmi) Devi. Langa Devta is their main deity. Rabha women are perfect in the art of weaving. While dealing with all the household chores, the Rabha women also weave clothes for their needs and also for other family members. Names of Rabha women costumes are called Rifan, Kambang and Khodabang and men's costumes are called Pajar, Khasne and Angsa (Bordoloi, Sharma Thakur and Saikia,1987).Weaver women of the Rabha community have also been awarded at the national level. Lady Rabha, Apeva Rabha, Aprica Rabha, Amiya Rabha etc. have received the President's Award for Excellence in Weaving.

Bodo Tribe:

Like the Rabhas, the Bodo tribe living in Assam is also a descendant of the Mongol family. Presently, people belonging to the Bodo-speaking group live in several states of the North-eastern region of India. The main states are Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Some people also live in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Bengal, Bihar and other neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bhutan. Ultimately, they are identified as Tibetan-Burmi. It is true that at first they settled in Tibet and Burma and later on many of them settled in different areas. The Bodo language is one of the scheduled languages of India and is also being studied at the university level. The main occupation of the Bodo tribe is farming. Most of the cultivable land is kept for paddy cultivation only because rice is the staple food of the Bodo population of Assam. Maisali, Bava and Asu are the three major varieties of their paddy. Apart from rice, jute, mustard and many types of pulses are grown simultaneously. Betel nut trees are also

planted for commercial purposes. Betel nuts play an important role in Bodo life. In the Bodo community, no social festival or ritual can be complete without betel nut or betel leaf. Betel nuts are also important as a cash crop and for these reasons betel nut trees are often grown in every Bodo house. (Mochahary, 2019).

Apart from this, weaving and silk production is an integral part of Bodo culture. It is a very large cottage industry of Bodo people. This not only enriches their culture but also brings economic stability to the families of the Bodo community. Boro women are skilled weavers. They produce high grade andy, muga and silk. They also cultivate cotton. Bodo women prepare cotton yarn, weave clothes for the family and for trade. A Boro woman is not seen with respect and does not make a place in society, unless she knows this art of weaving, not knowing this art becomes a negative point for her marital proposals. Boro women can beautifully weave large colorful flowers, trees, plants, vines, birds and other animals, butterflies and attractive objects and even stories into their weaving. Raising Erie insects, locating threads from the worm corpus and weaving clothes from them - they all do it happily in their daily lives either alone or in collaboration with others. It is a matter of great pride for them to wear their own hand made Dokhona (traditional dress) and Aronai (scarf) indoors or out (Brahma, 2014). Rice and vegetables obtained from the forest are the main part of their food. In addition, their diet must include animal meat and fish food; generally fish is preferred. They consume the meat for a long time by drying deer and pig flesh. They also dry small fish in the sun or in the fire, then grind it together and deposit it in the bamboo tube and close its mouth with banana leaves. It is called napham in Bodo. It can be stored for two to three years.

In the Kati Bihu festival celebrated by the Bodo community, goddess Laxmi is worshipped by lighting mustard oil torches in fields, paddy stores, stables, etc. The Magh Bihu festival is organized for the entertainment of the relatives and people of the community. Similarly, Bohag Bihu is an opportunity for enjoyment and fun. The Kherai dance which is performed by women and girls, is dedicated to the gods and goddesses and to ghosts and evil spirits for the welfare of individuals and communities so that relatives and neighbors are not harmed. These dances are also dedicated to mythological and historical heroes of the tribe. The Kudali Haba dance is performed by married couples who have had no children for many years and who wish to have children. This dance is also performed by couples whose children have died in childhood or at an early age. On these occasions,

Deori and Ojas songs and chants are also performed. Dances of unmarried girls, matrimonial ceremonies and other religious ceremonies on the occasion of worship of Baathi are all examples of Bodo culture and tradition.

Conclusion

Thus, after studying the major tribes of the seven states of the North-east, some of the following general characteristics can be seen in them. All the major tribes and sub tribes of the North-east are descendants of the Mongol family. The languages of all tribes and sub-tribes are Chinese - Tibetan or Tibetan - Barmi family languages. Apart from the patriarchal system, matriarchal systems can be seen among them, especially among the tribes of Meghalaya. In these, both joint and single family systems are seen. In the ancestral property, the sons, especially the younger son, have the right to the property. In many tribes, young people go to sleep in Mooroop or Morang before marriage. It is there that they are taught about social rites. Many different forms of marriage are prevalent in their society. Jhum farming is the main occupation of all the tribes. These tribes love to celebrate festivals. Song and dance are the main parts of their celebrations and all their festivals are based on different stages of farming.

All these tribes try to preserve their culture and tradition. In their society, women are equally respected as men and women of this society are skilled in many types of work. Their lifestyle is simple and is based on nature. Their social system is fully disciplined and their life is full of purity. These people are free from all kinds of discrimination and deceit which are often found in modern materialistic society. One of the essential features of these tribes is that there are no divisive factors in their society like casteism, religionism, untouchability, and there is no discrimination between male and female. There is no feeling of inferiority in anyone's mind. These tribes have respect for each other's culture and tradition and maintain a sense of brotherhood among themselves. There is no place in their mindset for longing and selfishness with respect to material resources. These people are simple and honest, and like to live a calm and collective life within their society However their innocence seems to have become their weakness in today's world. Today, urban populations are, in some cases, encroaching upon the tribal areas and impacting their homes, forests and livelihoods. Today, the civilization and culture of tribal society is under threat and these tribes are struggling with the crisis of their own existence.

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Report Review

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021

Read the full report here http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2021/en/

'The world is at a critical juncture' announces this report. This statement should make each of us sit up and take notice since the report addresses food and nutrition which has to be the central theme of all global endevours for the well-being of mankind. Food security and related dimensions such as hunger, starvation, and malnutrition are crucial indicators of what progress we have made as a community, and what more needs to be done. Are we on track towards ensuring access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all people all year round (SDG Target 2.1), or to eradicating all forms of malnutrition (SDG Target 2.2)? The answers may not bring much comfort.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021 is a multi-agency report put out by five UN organisations – Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), and World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Foreword to the Report has been jointly penned by the heads of the five above named organisations. At the outset it makes a humbling observation that 'the world has not been generally progressing' in either of the two important SDG targets, namely Target 2.1 and Target 2.2 quoted above. While stating that the COVID-19 Pandemic has disrupted progress by adversely impacting lives and livelihoods in 2020, it estimates that during this year between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger - 161 million more than in 2019; and nearly 2.37 billion people did not have access to adequate food - 320 million more than 2019. Therefore, in a sense, progress made in recent years has been rolled back. It expresses specific concern with respect to child nutrition stating that it is a challenge particularly in Africa and Asia. The Foreword goes on to appreciate the governments' responses including 'impressive social protection measures'. Yet these actions resulted in economic recession. Conflict and Climate related disasters are also quoted as being responsible for economic slowdowns and persisting inequalities.

Therefore this is a critical time for us as we see bigger challenges before us, yet also the opportunity for transformative actions to achieve the SDG targets. The authors look forward to the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit to generate ideas and action agendas for governments and policy makers all over. Additionally, the Nutrition for Growth Summit, and COP26 (on Climate Change) could enable further progress for ensuring food security and nutrition for all.

Later, some 'Key Messages' of the report are captured in three pages and this makes for interesting reading while providing a snapshot. Some of these point to the following:

- While global moderate or severe food insecurity had been increasing since 2014, the estimated increase in 2020 was equal to that of the previous five years combined. Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – an increase of almost 320 million people in just one year.

- Globally, gender gap in moderate or severe food insecurity has grown even larger in the pandemic year. It was 10 percent higher among women than men in 2020 (6 percent in 2019).

- Effective and inclusive governance mechanisms and institutions, access to technology, data and innovation, could serve to accelerate policies, investments and legislation aimed at transforming food systems.

- 2020 may also be a warning of unwelcome future events if the world does not commit to more resolute actions. The major drivers of recent food security and nutrition trends 'each have their own trajectory or cyclicality, which ensures they will continue to occur and could even worsen in the coming years'.

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary (ES) is a detailed articulation over 9 pages. To start with the ES states that it draws upon the previous 4 editions of the Report which have knowledge of the drivers affecting recent changes in food security and nutrition and thereby craft integrated solutions that can address challenges posed by these drivers.

Under the section *'Food Security and Nutrition around the World',* is a review of the current numbers of those affected by hunger and malnutrition. While the overall numbers present a worrisome picture, some numbers point to stark inequalities across regions of the world. Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia, in that order are worst affected. A worrying finding

is that nearly one in three people in the world did not have adequate food in 2020 about 2.37 billion people as against 2.05 billion in 2019 – a sharp increase; and, nearly 40 percent of these faced severe food insecurity. Further, the ES discusses issues of nutrition (stunting and wasting) in children below 5. But it states that there was insufficient date for 2020 and these do not include effects of COVID-19. Therefore the usefulness of this data with respect to COVID-19 is doubtful. Other metrics such as adult obesity, underweight-at-birth cases, optimal breastfeeding and anaemia among women of reproductive age are discussed in this section.

The next few paragraphs make an assessment of the likelihood of achieving SDG targets 2.1 and 2.2 by 2030. Under a COVID scenario, from a peak of 768 million in 2020, global hunger could reduce to around 660 million in 2030 with bigger reductions in Asia. The 2030 figure is higher than 30 million compared to a No-COVID scenario. Thus the world is not on track to achieve targets for any of the nutrition indicators by 2030; therefore exceptional efforts are required to accelerate progress.

Further, discussing the drivers, the ES states that conflict, climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns and downturns (worsened by COVID-19) are causes for rising hunger and slowing reduction of malnutrition. These drivers may also interact and create multiple, compounding impacts on food security. For example, conflict can affect across food production, harvesting, processing and transport to input supply, marketing and consumption. Climate issues could impact productivity and trade, the ES notes. Economic slowdowns and downturns affect the livelihoods and incomes of populations thereby negatively impact their affordability and access to food and a healthy diet. The downturn could be due to a variety of reasons, pandemics being one. Poverty and inequality amplify the impacts of these drivers, thereby presenting steeper challenges for the vulnerable.

Going further the ES states that during the last ten years the frequency and intensity of all the drivers have increased thereby undermining food security and nutrition, with particular concern in the case of low and middle income countries. Depending on whether impacted by one or multiple drivers, outcomes could vary. It is found that countries affected by multiple drivers 'consistently show the highest increases in the PoU, (Prevalence of Undernourishment) 12 times larger than those countries affected by only a single driver', as per the authors. Looking at income classification of countries, all low and

middle income countries were impacted by economic slowdown. In these countries, the increase in the numbers of undernourished was five times greater than the highest increase in the last two decades.

The next section of the ES is titled *'What needs to be done to transform food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets?'* There are six pathways recommended for the same. They are:

1) integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in conflict-affected areas;

2) scaling up climate resilience across food systems;

3) strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity;

4) intervening along the food supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods;

5) tackling poverty and structural inequalities, ensuring interventions are pro-poor and inclusive; and

6) strengthening food environments and changing consumer behaviour to promote dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment.

There is special mention of empowerment of the poor and vulnerable population groups as well as empowerment of women, children and youth. It recommends that measures of empowerment include increased access to productive resources including natural resources, agri inputs and technology, financial resources, knowledge and education. Special mention here is of organizational skills, and access to digital technology and communication. Further there is a call for policies, investments and legislation to empower consumers to *'pursue dietary patterns that are nutritious, healthy and safe and with a lower impact on the environment'*.

In conclusion the ES says that the world is not on track to ending world hunger and malnutrition; on world hunger, 'we are moving in the wrong direction'. It ends expressing hope that upcoming UN Food Systems Summit 2021 will show the way to a better future.

Main Report

The main report is divided into five chapters, the first of which is an Introduction. It delves into previous editions of the Report to understand the trend which has brought us to this state, including the drivers which affect food security and nutrition, the interaction among them and their impact on food systems. It points out to the three drivers impacting food security adding that poverty and wide inequality further exacerbate the problem. There

is a box item which refers to specific content from previous editions of the Report.

Chapter 2 is titled 'Food security and Nutrition around the World'. This chapter provides a global assessment of the food insecurity and malnutrition in the world in 2020, the COVID-19 year, stating that the pandemic adversely affected the already previously stalled progress towards achievement of the SDG Targets 2.1 and 2.2. It looks at the global regional and sub-regional findings. There are some graphs and tables including one that tracks the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) across regions and sub-regions of the world over the last fifteen years. An interesting figure is a pictorial depiction of the concentration and distribution of food insecurity across regions of the world. Table 5 in this Chapter contains interesting information regarding the cost of a 'Healthy Diet' in US$ per person per day in different regions of the world in 2019. It finds it is 4.37 in Africa, 4.13 in Asia, 4.25 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 3.43 in Northern America and Europe. The numbers seem quite steep and naturally unaffordable for large numbers of the populations of developing nations. Further, one needs to understand the composition of the diet given the vast variations in the climatic conditions and lifestyles across regions, sub-regions, and countries. In further pages, malnutrition indicators are discussed in detail with graphical and pictorial depictions.

Chapter 3 is titled 'Major drivers of recent food security and nutrition trends'. Conflict, Climate variability and extremes, and economic slowdowns and downturns are drivers as described earlier. The beginning of the Chapter contains key messages which give a good picture of the impacts of these. One of the key messages states *'Each of these major drivers is unique and, while they are external to food systems, they interact to create multiple, compounding impacts at many different points within food systems, to the detriment of food security and nutrition'*. The chapter contains detailed analyses of the three drivers and their impacts through several graphical and pictorial depictions. Figure 14, for example, shows how Impacts of various drivers are transmitted throughout food systems, undermining food security and nutrition.

Chapter 4 is titled 'What needs to be done to Transform Food Systems for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Affordable Healthy Diets?' As earlier, the Chapter starts with some key messages and goes on to discuss in detail the six Pathways (mentioned under ES) to achieve the objectives. One of the pathways is 'scaling up climate resilience across food systems'.

Under this are given examples of the actions taken/being taken in various developing nations. These could provide useful learnings. Another interesting example is provided in Box 10 where the Quito Agri-Food Pact which aims to increase the availability of nutritious foods in the City is discussed. Another valuable input, Box 11 describes the attempts to use women & youth empowerment as a lever for accelerating food systems transformation. Here the initiatives in various countries including Tajikistan, Indonesia, Senegal and Zambia are discussed.

Chapter 5 is named 'Conclusion'. At the beginning it states that the report ends on a negative as well as a positive note. 'The negative note is obvious' say the authors. 'Chapter 2 of this report makes it clear that, with less than a decade to 2030, we are not on track to ending world hunger and malnutrition – in fact, we are moving in the wrong direction. The picture is bleak', they further warn. However, on a positive note they say that we are aware of the drivers that impact food security and nutrition and their impacts on food systems. The solution could lie in transformation of these systems and that 'there is already momentum to do so'. We must pursue purposeful action on the pathways as identified, among other actions in order that we get back on the path for achieving the SDGs, more specifically SDG Targets 2.1 and 2.2 in the current context.

This report is a valuable document and a seminal articulation of the subject given the crucial importance of hunger, food, and nutrition to the world, especially the poor and vulnerable sections. Lack of adequate, timely, nutritious food can lead to physical and mental underdevelopment (not to forget the severe pain and trauma caused by hunger especially in the child), and has long term implications for the well-being of the coming generations. COVID-19 has further sharpened the already fragile situation on this front and possibly derailed our efforts. Policy makers and others could benefit from the prescriptions contained in this report for putting the effort back on track to achieve a just, equitable and inclusive future for all.

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OBJECTIVES

The main emphasis of the Institute's work is to see that the local bodies can contribute more effectively to the development process and provide the citizens with better living conditions by meeting their aspirations in terms of required amenities, infrastructure and better environmental conditions, thus contributing to social and economic development of the society as a whole by better management of the human settlements. While these are the long-term objectives, the immediate ones are:

- To advance knowledge of the principles and practices of Local Government by conducting research and by organising training courses and programmes at various centres in India for officials and elected representatives in the local bodies.
- To strengthen and improve Local Government Institutions by improving their performance through education, orientation and bringing them together for common endeavor by organising specialised conferences, conventions and seminars.
- To make available a platform for members of local bodies and officials for exchange of views and ideas related to urban development and administration.
- To represent the views of local authorities supported by research work to the concerned higher authorities from time to time.
- To publish bibliographies, articles, books and other literature on matters of interest to local bodies.
- To publish journals, bulletins and other literature on different aspects of Local Government and on the working of Local bodies in different states.
- To undertake research studies in public administration, problems of local bodies and also in related topics of urban and environmental factors and arrange for their publication etc.
- To establish and maintain an information-cum-documentation service for local bodies.
- To undertake consultancy assignments in various areas of urban development and problems of local bodies with a view to improve and develop organisational, managerial and operational efficiency.

In view of the above, the Institute has been collaborating with the relevant government departments, Central and State, Universities, Organisations and Research Institutions. The work of the Institute covers several aspects involving a multi-disciplinary teamwork.

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