



Indian Democracy in the times of COVID-19 Pandemic: The Challenges and Ways to Overcome

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Abstract: The paper aims to examine the challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 with special reference to India. The paper further analyses the measures undertaken by the government of India in order to tackle the global crisis. The paper tries to find out why a democratic country like India comes under severe criticism as far as the rights of migrant workers are concerned in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, paper explores the impact of coronavirus in India by analysing the socio-economic perspective. It will also look at the challenges that India is facing due to global pandemic and tries to put some ways to overcome.

Coronavirus is a global pandemic. People are fighting to come out from this crisis. This situation has created havoc across the globe and due to this countries are facing numerous challenges since last few months. One of the major challenges arises in the wake of COVID-19 is to control the disease as soon as possible. However, despite series of attempts to control this crisis nothing has done so far. Countries with high income and strong health system could have responded it in a better manner. But, “from the world’s most sophisticated European healthcare systems to the world’s largest spending healthcare system in the US, every country affected by Corona pandemic is struggling to control it” (Sharma 2020). In order to control it, people are being asked to be locked at home and follow some necessary guidelines undertaken by their respective governments.

Coronavirus is the biggest challenge that people have faced in life so far. However, the virus is considered more than a health crisis. According to UNDP, “Coronavirus is also an unprecedented socio-economic crisis. Stressing every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars” (UNDP 2020). Due to the crisis, every day people are losing jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return. Hence, every country needs to act

immediately to prepare, respond, and recover from it. In this regard, Indian experience also needs to be visualised.

Coronavirus in India

In India, the first case of coronavirus was reported on 30th January 2020 in the state of Kerala. It was reported that the affected person had travel history from Wuhan City of China. Though, India currently has the largest number of confirmed cases in Asia and has the third highest number of confirmed cases in the world after the United States and Brazil (Kulkarni 2020). Initially, the impact of coronavirus has not only posed the serious question to the government but also forced it to take necessary actions. Since 25th March 2020, when the first nationwide lockdown was announced, everything comes under scanner. From announcing lockdown to provide food and better health facilities or making temporary shelter for homeless people especially migrant workers who have walked on the road. Due to this, people (especially migrant workers) had suffered a lot. Nothing much steps had taken by the government to sort out migrants issues. Though, people are still seeking attention from government. According to Murthy, “the repeated lockdown has unravelled into a multi-pronged mess with various states starting to resent the continuous shutting of normal activities leading to chaos among migrant workers and the rising spectre of economic bankruptcy among small traders, medium businesses and even large industries” (Murthy 2020).

Here question arises, do Indian ruling elites really wants a solution for migrants workers or for god sake anyone who has suffered due to the COVID-19 outbreak? It is still a matter of prime concern in democratic countries like India as their concerns have not being addressed properly. Everybody is helpless in this regard. Though, the R&D department is giving their best to produce some concrete result but is unable to do so.

Migration is a very serious issue for the countries like India where half of the population still have to think about how to get food. They don't have enough money to buy food or any essential goods. Migration is still a very nominal phenomenon in India. Due to lack of economic opportunities in their native states, it has been taking place. For this, they have been facing many challenges wherever they go. No one cares about them. Recently, due to the COVID-19, the reverse migration has taken place. The question arises, why this is happening? We are mature enough to understand the reasons behind it. The government also lacks in having an appropriate policy in order to address the issue related to it. The coronavirus has given nothing except humiliation to the migrant workers.

Challenges to Indian Democracy in the wake of COVID-19

Democracy is a system of government in which the citizens exercise power directly or elect representatives from among themselves to form a governing body, such as a parliament. It is also known as “rule of the majority”. The power can't be inherited in democracy. People elect their leaders. Representatives stand in an election and the citizens vote for their representatives. The representative with the most number of votes gets the power. Though, there are some challenges for democracy like corruption and inefficiency, role of anti-social elements, growing social and economic inequalities, casteism and communalism, unfair treatment to the citizens and others. Bhatia argues that “As India marks 70 years of independence, its democratic institutions are suffering from weaknesses that the government has done little to

address. India today remains the world's largest democracy, but it is clearly facing serious threats. While anticorruption measures and economic reforms may be necessary, they are insufficient to ensure that all Indians continue to enjoy the benefits of a free and democratic society." (Bhatia 2017).

Prof. Ramesh Thakur (2018) had written an excellent piece few months back about Indian ruling elites who have been treated like anything and kept under so called "the special category". This is clear cut example of how VIPs are being treated in our country. This culture is promoted by Indian State in the name of providing all public services and facilities to those who are already rich or have special privilege over others. However, over the years, the Indian government has received much criticism regarding its VIPs culture. Anyone can see how the government served generously to them. So, here it can be said that granting special status to powerful Indians is nothing but making rich 'richer' and poor 'poorer'. It seems fit here, while Indian government has well planned to bring back its migrated citizens from abroad, it is still failed to help those who are eagerly migrating from mega-city to their native villages due to the situation arises from coronavirus.

That means the ordinary citizens or disempowered populace are facing challenges like poverty, job, scarcity of food, houses, proper health and sanitation facility. Here one can observe that how public resources and services are reserved for so-called "the special category". Here point to be noted that how Indian constitution reads about to become more and welfare state than it was. Keeping this in mind, the government should take more transparent approach in order to address the issue.

It would not be wrong to say where there are people, there is politics as society and politics are co-related. It is politics which gives better understanding about society and state through series of discussion and debate. For this, people participation is necessary in order to make a better society. It is the prime feature of democratic set-up anywhere in the world. Through it we can obviously make a just-society by giving equal right to all citizens reside in the country. For instance; India is adopted a democratic form of government to put forward a better example of its kind and, hence, it's been a biggest democracy of the world.

However, one can find various examples of exploitation in the name of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, religion and in the name of development in India. If anybody is being exploited then it should be duty of government to look into the matter as soon as possible. Then a society will become a just society. While discussing about the nature of Indian state, suddenly it comes into mind that almost seven decades have passed since the end of colonial rule, the discrimination and exploitation on the basis of caste, class, sex and religion are still prevalent in India. It is very unfortunate but its reality.

The political transition of India from colonial rule into a democratic society by adopting a progressive constitution allowing oppress, suppress and depress class not only polling right but also into the corridors of power. Beside these, constitution also provides different type of fundamental rights to all its citizens out of which freedom of speech and expression has been the main basis of the 'idea of liberty' which again been one of the basic principle of democracy. It can be placed in a category of "rainbow nation" which Nelson Mandela often used it for South Africa after assuming the power where he said all sections of society (black and white) will be able to walk tall without any fear with human dignity.

In our case, the story tell us a different story as our society still struggling with caste, class, gender, group rights, and also witnessed numbers of ethnic and communal violence. There also social diseases like poverty, hunger, corruption and exploitation of oppressed class in the shadow of capitalism are widespread. This is the biggest challenge to the very idea of globalisation. As far as India's wealth is concerned, only 57 billionaires control 70 per cent of India's wealth. According to an Oxfam report released by the World Economic Forum, India is the second most unequal economy after Russia (Times of India 2017).

Hence, India immediately needs redistribution of her wealth in order to become truly welfare state. Actually, problem is not wealth but its re-distribution. So, we can make our society just and egalitarian society only after releasing all the rights to the downtrodden people. According to agrawal, "Governments can start to reduce inequality by rejecting market fundamentalism, opposing the special interests of powerful elites, and changing the rules and systems that have led to where we are today. There is a need to implement reforms that redistribute money and power and level the playing field" (2016). There should be no discrimination on the basis the reasons described above in the paper. This idea would real be an idea of welfare state too. The elimination of social evils or diseases from society can make India a just-society, a real welfare state, a real democratic.

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