

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

April 2020



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”
- The Mother

Year II

Issue I

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year II

Issue I

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

INDIA'S FLAILING AND UNJUSTIFIABLE APPROACH TOWARDS COVID19: MORE COSTS AND GREATER FAILURE

The imposition of one of the world's most stringent COVID19 lockdowns in India for almost 40 days, between March 25th and May 3rd, and beyond that, has resulted in an unmitigated mess in almost all aspects of national life. In the previous article, we had analyzed how this lockdown was an overreaction. Based on the vague nature of COVID19, low mortality rate, scientifically proven mild nature of the majority of infections and WHO's official stand that 80% people can be cured at home, we had argued that India's response was disproportionate. We had also explained how there was absolutely no evidence to show that imposing social distancing through lockdowns can only curb the disease for a short while, with the disease bound to recur once a lockdown is lifted. A lockdown, by itself – if it could be without other baggages such as fears and lacunas in execution due to the all-pervading utilitarian spirit – must necessarily dampen the spread of a contagious disease. Still, as is clear from the data in Table 4, this has not been witnessed in the cases of India.

Further, an analysis of the measures taken by major infected countries shows that not a single country imposed a nationwide lockdown of the type India did – some countries like Sweden and Japan refused to legally enforce any kind of lockdown at all, pinning the responsibility for social distancing and caution on individual citizens. As things stand at present, Sweden – despite having 217 deaths per million people – is expected to reach the stage of 'herd immunity' (the stage where majority of population has developed immunity to the virus) by May, with about 30% people in Stockholm having already developed immunity (Mai, 2020).

Other countries are doing well too. In most European

countries, in US and across the world, the rate of transmission of infections has slowed down considerably, since they have reached the peaking of their cases. In the case of West European and North American countries which account for the highest numbers of infections and deaths, the rate of spread of the virus during the period of India’s strict lockdown (March 24 – May 5) has been much slower than in the case of India (Table 4). This is significant because during this period these countries had not imposed a lockdown of a scale coming anywhere close to India (Table 1).

COMPARING THE RATES OF GROWTH OF INFECTIONS ACROSS SOME MAJOR COUNTRIES

India imposed its lockdown starting March 25th – although a Janata curfew was imposed earlier on March 22nd, after which several states went into unilateral curfews/shutdowns prior to March 25th – with just about 500 cases and 10 deaths in the whole of India.

Table 1: India’s ranking in terms of stringency index (as of April 30th):

Country	Stringency Index¹ (in terms of rules on paper)²
India	100
Afghanistan	76.3

¹ Parameters used are rules stipulated by the governments for: school closing; workplace closing; cancel public events; restrictions on gatherings; close public transport; stay-at-home requirements; restrictions on internal movements; international travel controls; income support; debt relief; fiscal measures; international support; public information campaigns; testing policy; emergency investment in healthcare; investment in vaccines.

² It is important to note that ***this index does not measure the stringency with which the lockdown is being enforced. For instance, the***

Malaysia	71.03
UAE	90.7
Bangladesh	94.5
Brazil	70.5
Germany	78.9
Egypt	88.7
Spain	89.4
France	93.3
UK	82.2
Iran	51.5
Israel	87.5
Italy	94.5
Japan	51.1
Pakistan	91.5
Peru	96.03
Russia	59.5
Saudi Arabia	91.01

index ranks Malaysia at 71.03 – a much lower and less stringent rank than India. However, the enforcement of rules by the Malaysian police is brutal and India does not even come close to it. In fact, since March 18th, Malaysia has had one of the highest arrest rates in the world – higher than Philippines even. It’s mobility of citizens has decreased by 83% during lockdown, showing its strict nature. After Philippines – which has shoot-at-sight orders – Malaysia comes second in south-east Asia in

Turkey	58.2
Ukraine	92.06
United States	68.4

Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

As of April 30th, India continues to occupy the dubious position of having the world’s strictest lockdown, in terms of the stringency of rules formulated by the government. While the intervening days and weeks throughout April have seen various guidelines being issued and attempts being made to ease supply chains and exempt essential activities and businesses, they haven’t really worked well in reality. Industries have not been allowed to function by the respective state governments, even as administration continues to formulate impossible rules and adopt a draconian approach towards anyone wanting to open up.

India has also seen a significant reduction in movement of people during this lockdown, likely not voluntarily, but imposed by the governmental lockdown.

Table 2: Approximate reduction in mobility of people during COVID19 lockdown:

Countries	Decrease in mobility (retail/recreation)
Bangladesh	-73%

terms of police brutality in enforcing lockdown, arresting thousands of people and placing complete prohibitions on movement. Indeed, in Malaysia, even the army is being deployed to enforce the lockdown. However, these strict measures have also been accompanied by COVID19 limitation measures like contact tracing, aggressive testing etc. to effectively control the virus (Nixon, 2020).

India	-86%
Italy	-92%
Japan	-45%
Malaysia	-83%
New Zealand	-88%
Pakistan	-63%
Peru	-95%
Saudi Arabia	-70%
Spain	-92%
Sri Lanka	-84%
Turkey	-91%
UK	-78%
US	-42%

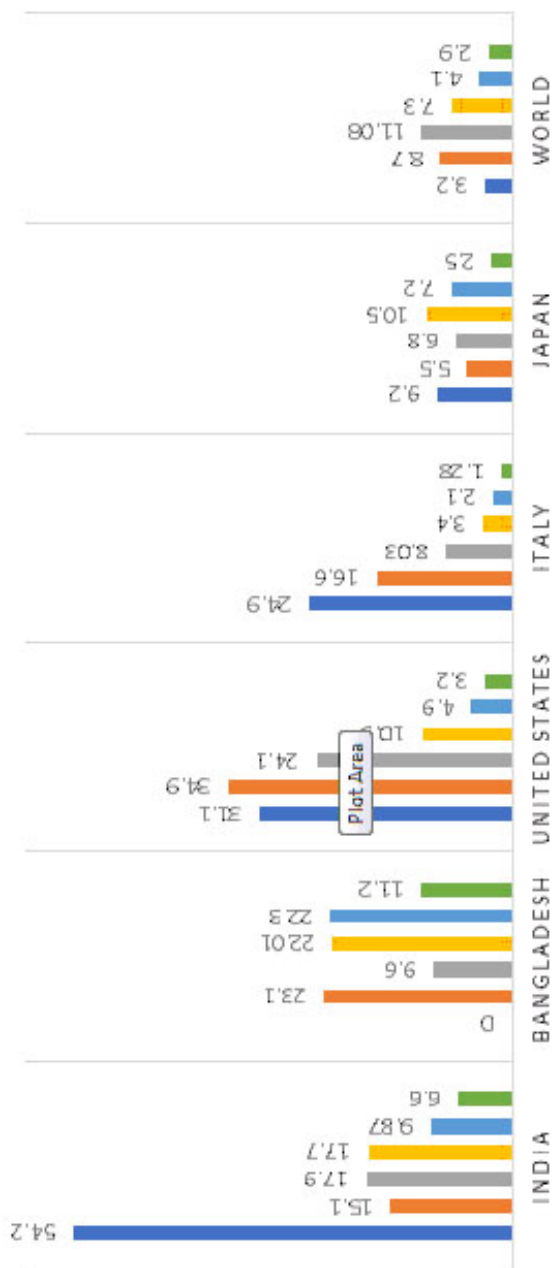
Source: Google community mobility reports

However, despite such a strict lockdown, the speed with which the number of cases/infections of COVID19 have grown has outstripped most other comparable countries, as well as countries which have the highest absolute number of cases.

Graph 1: Inter-country comparison of average daily percentage increase in cases every 10 days between March 1st and April 29th (%):

DAILY AVERAGE INCREASE IN CASES EVERY 10 DAYS (%)

■ March 1-10
 ■ March 11-20
 ■ March 21-30
 ■ March 31-April 9
 ■ April 10-19
 ■ April 20-29



The graph above shows that the rate of increase of infections is much slower than India even in countries with highest absolute numbers, such as US, Italy and the rest of the world. In India, over 40 days of lockdown, more than 40,000 cases have been detected. ***In the 60 days since the cases started increasing in India, average daily case detection has increased from eight to 1,400*** (Raman, 2020).

Notably, ***while India took 75 days to record its initial 10,000 cases, January 31st to April 14th, cases have been rapidly adding up since then. India took just 8 days to cross the 20,000 mark and 7 days to hit the 30,000 mark. In a worsening situation, it took just 4 days to hit the 40,000 mark*** (WION, 2020). More than anything else, this shows that instead of bringing the situation under control, the lockdown has had the opposite effect. Despite such a strict lockdown over such a prolonged period of time, India's cases have surprisingly not peaked and continue to show a steep high rate of increase.

INDIA: AVERAGE DAILY PERCENTAGE INCREASE WEEK-WISE (%)



Table 3: No. of days taken for cases to peak before starting to decrease:

Countries	No. of days for cases to peak
Germany	6
United Kingdom	20
Ireland	12
France	16
Spain	18
Italy	12
Denmark	28

Source: Raman (2020)

Unlike in India, many other countries with lockdowns and high number of cases reached their peak and started showing a decline within a month of the lockdown.

In terms of average daily growth rates, during the initial phase (March 25th to May 3rd) of the lockdown, India's growth rate was the 6th highest at 11.6% out of 51 countries that had more than 5000 by May 3rd. Russia topped with 15.2% while the world average was 5.5%.

If we assume that lockdown measures in India would take time to have some effect, it is not borne out. Between April 15th (when India was well in the midst of the lockdown) and May 3rd, India's average daily growth rate was 7.2 per cent (11th place). Bangladesh topped at 12.8 per cent and the world average was 3.1 per cent (Soz, 2020). ***In the last few days, since May beginning, India's average daily growth rate (between May 1st and May 6th) remains high at 7.3%. This is despite the world's longest and strictest lockdown*** in place. In many places like

Ahmedabad, amidst worsening conditions, the lockdown has been tightened beyond all limits, not even allowing easy access to groceries.

Table 4: Increase in incidence of cases between March 3rd and May 5th across some major countries:

Country/ Region	Popula- tion de- nsity (p eople per sq. km of land area)	Cases/ count per million (as of May 5)	Initial starti- ng count (on March 3)	Count (on March 24)	Final count (May 5)	Increase (no. of times) (March 3-24)	Increa- se (no. times) (March 24-May 5)
Bangladesh	1239.6	67.7	1	39	10929	39.0	280.2
Belarus	46.7	1934.9	1	81	18350	81.0	226.5
Brazil	25.1	551.2	2	2247	115455	1123.5	51.4
Egypt	98.9	73.2	2	402	7201	201.0	17.9
France	122.3	2522.3	204	22304	168935	109.3	7.6
Germany	237.4	2014.4	196	32986	167007	168.3	5.1
India	454.9	36.5	5	536	49400	107.2	92.2
Indonesia	147.8	45.1	2	686	12071	343.0	17.6
Iran	50.2	1222.1	2336	24811	99970	10.6	4
Italy	205.5	3525.4	2502	69176	213013	27.6	3.1
Japan	347.1	120.6	293	1193	15253	4.1	12.8
Korea, South	529.7	209.4	5186	9037	10806	1.7	1.2
Malaysia	96.0	202.5	36	1624	6383	45.1	3.9

Mexico	64.9	206.2	5	405	26025	81.0	64.3
New Zealand	18.6	307.4	1	155	1488	155.0	9.6
Nigeria	215.1	15.1	1	44	2950	44.0	67
Pakistan	275.3	103.9	5	972	22049	194.4	22.7
Peru	25.0	1600.2	1	416	51189	416.0	123.1
Russia	8.8	1075.4	3	495	155370	165.0	313.9
Saudi Arabia	15.7	897.7	1	767	30251	767.0	39.4
Singapore	7953.0	3442.3	110	558	19410	5.1	34.8
Spain	93.5	4686.9	165	39885	219329	241.7	5.5
Sweden	25.0	2281.6	21	2286	23216	108.9	10.2
Turkey	107.0	1573.0	1	1872	129491	1872.0	69.2
Ukraine	77.0	284.5	1	97	12697	97.0	130.9
United Kingdom	274.8	2933.9	51	8077	194990	158.4	24.1
United States	35.8	3686.6	118	53736	1204351	455.4	22.4
Canada	4.1	1705.8	30	2790	63214	93.0	22.7
China	148.3	60.3	80261	81591	83968	1.0	1
England	430.0	2318.8	177	13102	129799	74.0	9.9

The table above shows that between March 24th and May 5th – the period coinciding with the lockdown – India’s infections/cases rose by approximately 92 times. ***Prior to the lockdown –***

between March 1st (with 3 cases) and March 24th – India’s cases had risen by 107.2 times.

The only countries which have seen a higher rise in infections than India between March 24th and May 5th – starting from comparable single-digit original number of cases on March 3rd – are Ukraine, Russia, Peru, Belarus and Bangladesh.

There are other countries which started with single-digit cases on March 3rd, but which have controlled their infections after seeing a higher rise in the initial and intermediate phases, meaning that their cases may have peaked and started coming down. These are Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Let us now see the nature of lockdown measures in some of the countries with original cases comparable to India.

PRACTICAL/DYNAMIC NATURE OF LOCKDOWN IMPLEMENTATION IN COUNTRIES WITH OVERALL INCIDENCE OF INFECTIONS HIGHER THAN INDIA

Russia: A stricter lockdown than India replete with brutality:

Russia has put in place extremely stringent measures, more so than India. While on the stringency index, its rank is much lower than India, yet the index measures only governmental rules on paper rather than how the lockdown is being enforced. In terms of practical enforcement, Russia has seen a brutal crackdown by authorities on anyone who violates lockdown rules.

These rules have been in place since March 30th and were announced as a ‘holiday’. They have entailed that people cannot step out of their houses except under special circumstances or

for essential needs. These measures have been put in place till May 11th. ***While initially Russia had very few cases, with there being just two cases on February 15th, there was a sudden rise in cases since the end of March – interestingly the spike in cases has coincided with the imposition of the lockdown.***

It has also coincided with forcible detentions and oppression by the police. Anyone who wants to leave his home has to have an electronic pass. People who are breaking the lockdown rules are being forcibly thrown into detention by the police. Places – such as hospitals, buildings etc. – which are infected are immediately being locked up, with people being forcibly locked/quarantined inside. Facial recognition technology use is being taken to new levels, micro-surveilling not just individuals but also detecting how close people are standing to each other using just their silhouettes.

All these measures – combined with economic hardship, closure of small businesses etc. – have given rise to immense fear in people’s psychology. Thus, in spite of the strict and brutal lockdown, the cases in Russia have risen exponentially. Indeed, the rise in cases has been directly proportional to the increasing stringency of the lockdown, indicating clearly that fear and panic arising out of lockdown measures has led to escalation of COVID19 cases by making people more vulnerable to the virus.

Turkey: Highly Relaxed Partial Restrictions with Economy Being the Prime Concern:

Turkey has seen a sharp spike in infections, but so far, has had an **extremely relaxed approach towards the partial lockdown**. It first announced a lockdown around April 11th. This was not a complete lockdown per se, but a 48-hour curfew across 31 cities. Similarly, in the next phase, Turkey again announced a

4-day lockdown across 31 cities, from April 23rd to April 27th, made to coincide with Ramzan.

However, economic considerations were foremost, as curfew was imposed only on people under the age of 20 and over the age of 65, thereby exempting the working-age population from lockdown. Moreover, workplaces, businesses, bakeries and hospitals/pharmacies etc. have continued to operate.

Prior to the declaration of the first initial curfew, the number of infections had begun to rise sharply already reaching 55000 with more than 1200 deaths, when Erdogan reluctantly took the decision to announce partial restrictions. Turkey's ***lockdown was not forcibly imposed. People were asked to stay at home voluntarily. The primary concern was to continue to sustain economic activities and exports.*** Other measures included ban on international travel across Iran, China and Italy – which was decided early-on – and partial restrictions on domestic air travel and check-points across cities to check unessential travel. ***Schools, restaurants, barber shops, nightclubs and prayers at mosques have been shut.***

However, this is a ***partial lockdown, based on age-wise, city-wise and town-wise restrictions.*** Public transport in cities is still allowed, as are businesses, workplaces and economic activities, which were never shut down even during the partial lockdown phases. Turkey had tried to adopt a Sweden-like approach, but is now rethinking it with a sharp continuous rise in cases and fatalities. Turkey has been trying to take decisions based on the primary question of what will entail lesser economic costs? A full Europe-like lockdown which would supposedly curb the virus or make it peak, or a current relaxed one which might supposedly lead to higher infections and

fatalities and entail almost equal damage to the economy due to on-and-off restrictions.

Turkey currently has the world's 8th highest cases and more than 3000 deaths. ***During the period of lockdown, between April 11th and April 30th, the number of infections in Turkey increased by 2.3 times. Prior to lockdown, between March 12th (with 1 case and continuous rise) and April 10th, the number of infections rose by 47029 times.***

Ukraine: Partial Lockdown:

Ukraine enacted containment measures on March 12th, when there was just 1 case. Ukrainian lockdown has been more in the European-style, rather than a brutal lockdown like the one followed by Russia. It has closed non-essential services and activities and has asked people to stay at home. Businesses such as cafes, restaurants, markets and cinemas have been shut, as has air and rail travel, thereby leading to job losses and street protests against the restrictions by businessmen. Due to the economic hardship and pressure from businesses, barber shops and food markets, supermarkets, car and hardware services etc. had been opened up during the lockdown itself.

Much like Turkey and the rest of Europe, Ukraine has been concerned about the economic impact. It also does not have the European-type social security system that can allow unemployment and other benefits, thereby reducing hardship for small businesses. As per estimates, 8% Ukrainians lost their jobs during the lockdown (Reuters, 2020). During the lockdown period, activity of 277,000 enterprises – 76% of them relating to markets – was affected (112 UA, 2020). The government has evolved a 5-stage exit plan, focused on revival of the economy, starting May 11th.

During the lockdown period, between March 12th and April 30th, the number of infections has risen by nearly 3470 times.

Saudi Arabia: Partial Lockdown with Changing Restrictions

Saudi Arabia had 22753 cases as of April 30th. Since February, the country has been undertaking containment measures and ***imposing temporary partial bans, curfews and restrictions from time-to-time. It has avoided a full-scale lockdown.*** In late February, the country banned Muslims from entering Mecca and Medina, including banning daily and Friday prayers. These restrictions were made more complete by March. Besides, restricting international travel, the country also, by 20th March, suspended domestic flights, trains, buses, taxis etc. for a 14-day period. On 24th March, a nation-wide curfew was announced with restrictions on movement limited to time-slots. 24-hour curfew was imposed on holy cities of Mecca and Medina starting April 2nd. 24-hour curfews were also imposed on some cities like Riyadh, Dammam, Tabuk, Dhahran and Hofuf, Jeddah, Qatif, Ta'if and Khobar.

Social events and funerals have been banned. Malls, shopping places, restaurants and parks have been shut. Spreading misinformation or violating rules attracts arrests. Essential services and businesses have been kept open. ***Prior to imposition of more elaborate lockdown measures starting March 24th, the cases in the country rose by 562 times between March 3rd (with 1 case and rising) and March 23rd. During the lockdown, between March 24th and April 30th, the incidence of rise in cases was 29.6 times.***

Peru: Extremely Strict Lockdown

Among all the Latin American countries, Peru has had the

strictest lockdown. It enacted lockdown measures on March 16th for a 15-day period, further extending it to April 12th, and then to April 26th and then to May 10th. Online permission forms had to be filled to obtain permission to leave homes. The measures were tightened even further on March 18th, with complete ban on movement between 8 PM and 5 AM. Violations attracted widespread arrests and cases of police brutality have been highlighted. 200 women were publicly detained on 1st day of lockdown for violations.

Over the weeks, the initial lockdown has assumed more and more stringency, with even grocery stores not allowed to open beyond 3 PM. Men were allowed to leave the house on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, while women could leave on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, to get groceries. This controversial gender-discrimination measure was cancelled after an outcry. Sunday is a day of complete ban. These measures are supposed to make it easier for police to identify people. Peru's has easily been amongst the world's toughest lockdowns.

Prior to the lockdown, between March 6th (with 1 case) and March 15th, the infections rose by 71 times. During the stringent lockdown, between March 16th and April 30th, the infections have risen by nearly 430 times. Much like Russia, Peru's case shows that the stringency and completeness of the lockdown, entailing immense fear and state brutality, has been directly proportional to the spike in COVID19 cases.

Belarus: Denial of COVID19, Zero Lockdown and Nil Restrictions

Despite the rise in infections, there is absolutely no lockdown in Belarus. Indeed, it has a more flippant attitude than Sweden even. Its President has denied the existence of this virus

and has instead advised people to carry on as usual. There are not even minimal restrictions or advisories regulating public gatherings. However, health experts differ from the government. Streets are quieter than the normal, since people are generally cautious despite the governmental attitude.

From 4 cases on March 3rd, Belarus's cases have increased to 14,027 by April 30th. Between March 24th and April 30th, the increase has been 173 times.

Brazil: Partial Containment Measures

With more than 1,00,000 cases and more than 7000 deaths, Brazil has refused to implement a full scale lockdown. Individual Governors have imposed varying degrees of lockdown in their provinces, but the President has consistently opposed this, has denied the significance of COVID19 and has urged people to defy all restrictions and go to work. Like Trump, he has also supported anti-containment protestors.

Bangladesh: An Ineffective, Self-suicidal and Unsustainable Lockdown

Bangladesh imposed a lockdown, starting late March, from March 26th for 10 days, in the form of a 'holiday'. This was gradually extended till April 25th. Now it has been extended till May 5th, as the cases continue to rise. The infection has spread to 58 of 64 districts of the country, with the government admitting to community transmission.

Bangladesh has 7667 cases and 168 deaths as of April 30th, with almost half the cases from Dhaka city. On March 8th, the first three cases were confirmed. On March 22nd, when the number of cases was just 27, the government declared a nation-wide shutdown effective from March 26th to April 4th. This was

later extended to May 5th, as the number of cases continued to increase. ***Bangladesh is also the only country where the number of fatalities due to COVID19 outstrip the recoveries.***

Table 5: Comparison among SAARC countries:

Country	First Infected	53rd day	Deaths till 53rd day	Cases by 53rd day	Recovery rate (%)
Bangladesh	8-Mar	29-Apr	163	7103	2.11
Pakistan	26-Feb	18-Apr	159	7993	23.37
Afghanistan	24-Feb	16-Apr	30	794	12.47
India	30-Jan	22-Mar	7	360	6.67
Maldives	7-Mar	28-Apr	0	249	6.83
Sri Lanka	27-Jan	19-Mar	0	66	
Bhutan	5-Mar	26-Apr	0	7	57.14
Nepal	23-Jan	15-Mar	0	1	100

Source: WHO; Shovon (2020)

In terms of comparison between countries of the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh has the lowest recovery rate, while its fatalities by the 53rd day of detection of virus was higher than other countries, making it amongst the worst-hit countries in the region. Testing has also been low in Bangladesh, with 393 tests per million. In India itself, the testing rate is low, but higher than Bangladesh, at 602 tests per million. In Pakistan, it is 825 tests per million, and in Sri Lanka it is 1047 tests per million. In Nepal, it is 1963 tests per million, while Bhutan is doing 13,018 tests per million of the population.

The lockdown has entailed closure of industries, schools,

companies, transport facilities, agricultural activities and religious places like mosques. In mosques, only 5 people (including priests and government supervisors) could continue prayer offering, while the rest of the public has been disallowed to enter. During Ramzan, this number has been increased to 12, although public is not allowed. Iftar gatherings have also been banned.

There have been some violations of the lockdown, with two very large-scale gathering of clerics in March. ***In the middle of the ongoing lockdown, on 18th April, there was a gathering of public for a religious procession and a funeral of an important cleric attended by at least 1 lakh people. No action has been taken, except promises to investigate.*** Also, people have been easily able to violate the lockdown by travelling from one district to another in heavy goods vehicles, with the police unable to stop them. Thousands of heavy goods vehicles have been allowed inter-district movement and factories manufacturing important items remained functional, so that there is no crisis of food or medicines (Ahamed & Talukder, 2020).

Police has also not been able to effectively completely ensure that people don't come out for work other than essential work. Thus, the intent of complete lockdown has been incomplete in practice and is lax by standards of rules put in place, with the authorities being easily fooled by people. ***While the rules of the lockdown are strict, attempts to enforce it by the police have not been as successful.*** In the beginning of April, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police had to tighten the rules and impose fines as people continued coming out for non-essential work and for socializing. The prolonged lockdown is now proving unsustainable for the country, in which almost 90% people are employed as informal workforce. Within first week of April,

almost 9 million contractual and daily-wage workers in the transport sector have been left without any source of cash or income since the lockdown was imposed (Sakib, 2020).

In particular, the backbone of the country's 80% revenue – the garment industry – has taken a hit. An exception was made for this industry to partially operate during the lockdown and towards the end of April, the decision was taken to fully open it up with requisite 'social distancing' measures. However, due to export-dependency, the industry has taken a hit, with more than a million people being laid off. What is visible now is the increasing unrest among people due to the rising economic toll of the lockdown. People living in slums in densely populated Dhaka have already run out of both cash and food, admitting that, for them, death due to hunger is a bigger immediate threat than the virus (Hasan, 2020). Since the beginning of April, thousands of workers have defied lockdown orders to protest in Dhaka for unpaid wages (Savage, 2020). As a result of the unsustainable lockdown, Bangladesh has made its garment factories, on the outskirts of Dhaka, fully functional, since April 26th.

THE UNREASON IN INDIA'S RESPONSE: FAILURE OF THE LOCKDOWN

The analysis of cases of some of the countries, given above, shows that in countries like Russia and Peru – which have performed worse than India in the practical enforcement of their lockdown – cases have dramatically seen a sharp rise during the lockdown period. Logically, a lockdown – by enforcing social distancing – should have been able to control the spread of infection. After all, in countries like Italy, Spain, US, France, Brazil, UK, China etc., we have seen that lockdowns have been able to

successfully ensure that the cases peaked very soon and then the rate of increase start falling.

However, these are also the countries where the lockdown has been imposed much later and has been much more flexible. In countries like India, Russia, Peru and Bangladesh, lockdowns have been imposed at very early stages and have spanned the whole country and been extremely stringent in nature. These are also the countries where, despite such a prolonged and thorough lockdown, the cases have increased sharply rather than decreased. This makes India’s response of lockdown to the COVID19 a complete failure. The assumption that a lockdown of this scale – accompanied by a perverted psychology wreaking suffering upon people – will break the back of the virus has proven to be a completely wrong. Moreover, 83% of reported COVID19 deaths in India are of those who already had some co-morbidities, indicating that corona alone has not killed people (India Today, 2020).

Table 6: Countries (excluding China) with cases higher than India and time taken to cross 50,000 cases:

Country	Comparable starting range of cases	Date of reaching 50,000 cases	No. of days taken to cross 50k mark	Stringency of lockdown ³ (April 10th)
India	71 (March 11)	6-May	55 days	100
US	75 (March 1)	24-Mar	23 days	71.5
Italy	79 (Feb 22)	21-Mar	20 days	90.6
Spain	84 (March 1)	26-Mar	25 days	89.4
UK	87 (March 4)	6-Apr	28 days	82.2

³ Oxford Governmental Response Index

Russia	63 (March 15)	21-Apr	36 days	92.8
France	57 (Feb 28)	31-Mar	31 days	89.4
Germany	74 (Feb 28)	27-Mar	29 days	78.9
Brazil	77 (March 12)	24-Apr	42 days	70.5
Turkey	47 (March 16)	11-Apr	26 days	80.4
Iran	61 (Feb 24)	2-Apr	39 days	65.3
Canada	77 (March 9)	28-Apr	49 days	79.9
Peru	71 (March 15)	5-May	50 days	96.03

India has taken 55 days to cross 50,000 cases. This may be the longest time compared to other countries, but has come at the cost of highest stringency level. Moreover, the recent spike in cases has been such that India took just 4 days to cross from 40,000 to 50,000 cases – as soon as the lockdown was relaxed after May 3rd.

Comparably, countries like Canada and Brazil – with much less and relaxed lockdown levels – also almost took the comparably same range of days as India to cross the 50,000 mark. This makes it evident that India has simply been delaying the inevitable rise of COVID19 cases – the level of infections the country would reach before it peaks and starts going down. Regardless of the lockdown, these cases will rise – the only thing is that a lockdown may simply delay the rise but not prevent it. India may have taken 55 days to cross 50,000 cases, but as we will see in the subsequent analysis, this delay has come at a massive, irreparable material and psychological cost. It has not addressed, but prolonged the issue at a huge cost to the nation.

India’s case and failure on every possible objective metric indicates that ***a lockdown, in itself, means very little. It is the***

consciousness and the collective psychology accompanying such a measure that has an effect and determines our success in dealing with any epidemic. The more there is prevalence of fear – fear and paranoia of the epidemic, and, fear due to other aspects of life affected by the lockdown – the more the situation will worsen instead of getting better. In India, the fear of the virus and about changes spawned by the lockdown has magnified the impact of the virus a lot more in people’s minds. The accompanying psychological suffering has further led to a deterioration in the country’s collective consciousness. ***Otherwise, with the level of India’s lockdown, the virus should have halted instead of spreading.***

As the Mother has said, ***“From the ordinary point of view, in most cases, it is usually fear — fear, which may be mental fear, vital fear, but which is almost always physical fear, a fear in the cells — it is fear which opens the door to all contagion...And then, to overcome that, the control of a conscious will is necessary. It is usually this kind of fear that opens the door to illnesses. And I am not speaking of the first two types of fear which, as I said, any human being who wants to be human in the noblest sense of the word, must overcome, for that is cowardice. But physical fear is more difficult to overcome; without it even the most violent attacks could be repelled. If one has a minimum of control over the body, one can lessen its effects, but that is not immunity. It is this kind of trembling of material, physical fear in the cells of the body which aggravates all illnesses...But when one can eliminate fear, one is almost in safety. For example, epidemics, or so-called epidemics...ninety-nine times out of a hundred they come from fear: a fear, then, which even becomes a mental fear in its most sordid form, promoted by newspaper articles, useless talk and so on”*** (CWM 9, 2004).

India's response to the virus clearly shows the working of this fear. When PM Modi, on 19th March, first gave his speech on COVID19 highlighting its serious nature and sowing the first seed of fear in the public's mind, there was a sharp spike in cases. On 20th March, the cases had daily rate of increase of 29.2%. On 19th March, this rate was 15.7% compared to previous day. Between 20th and 24th March, the daily average rate of spread became 23.6%. This coincided with the period when the lockdown was already underway, with the country having observed the Janata curfew on 22nd March and majority of states having announced premature and unilateral restrictions after the Janata curfew.

Finally, to top this, the central government triggered all-out panic by announcing a sudden nation-wide lockdown – without giving any assurances, any time for preparations etc. – on 24th March evening. On 25th March, the recorded daily growth rate was at a high of 15%.

Even worse, despite the fact that the initial phase of lockdown was extremely stringent (relaxations were announced much later after the government realized that supply chain crisis had been caused), yet, despite this stringency, India consistently saw double-digit daily case growth rates. During the first 11 days of lockdown, India's daily average case growth rate was 18.6% (between March 26th and April 5th). India continued with a double-digit growth rate till April 13th, and on April 19th again touched double digit daily growth rate of 10%. ***Since the lockdown started, India recorded its highest daily growth rate on April 1st at 26% - when the lockdown was well underway.***

One cannot even blame these high growth rates on the migrant exodus that took place after the lockdown, as migrants who went to their villages did not spread any infection there. ***Major migrant exodus occurred from Delhi to UP in this phase of lockdown. In UP, most of the migrants have come from***

Bundelkhand region. Yet, despite this exodus, UP continued to – and still has – a COVID19 trajectory much better than many other big states. Indeed, the first COVID19 case in Jhansi city of Bundelkhand was detected on April 27th, while the entire UP Bundelkhand region had only 3 cases as of April 27th (Ghosh, 2020). This shows that the massive reverse migration during late March has not been the reason for India’s high growth rates.

There are other factors. The Tablighi Jamaat congregation shares the blame for being the single source for nearly 30% of India’s cases, and, to implement the lockdown in a country with such high levels of population density in some cities and slums is very difficult. ***It should have been understood at the outset that a lockdown could never work out in a country as diverse, dense and large as India. To fear monger and implement it has thoroughly backfired.***

A SELF-CONTRADICTORY LOCKDOWN: THE GOVERNMENT EXPOSES ITS POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS

It was always well-known that given India’s density, diversity and socio-economic conditions, a lockdown could never work in controlling the spread of the virus. Yet, to earn political patting and out of a series of misjudgments, the decision to impose such a sweeping lockdown was taken, for more than 40 days. However, the recent actions of the government – a part of providing ‘relaxations’ under the third phase of the lockdown – betray how it is attempting to undo the disastrous decision without losing face. For, it is now becoming increasingly clear that India is, both, failing to control the rate of increase of infections and is facing a broken economy, bringing the validity of lockdown in question.

The recent attempts by state governments to ***open up alcohol shops*** underscore this point. In India, according to WHO

data, every year nearly 2.6 lakh people die due to consumption of alcohol – with 32% men and 11% women drinking alcohol. This amounts to nearly 700 deaths every day, and includes conditions caused due to alcohol consumption such as liver cirrhosis, cancer and alcohol-related road accidents (Dainik Bhaskar, 2020). Not only do alcohol-related deaths far exceed deaths likely to be even potentially caused due to COVID19, but also betray the government’s politically-motivated decisions around COVID19.

The decision to open alcohol shops in the midst of a nation-wide lockdown – since alcohol forms a major part of state government incomes which have plunged by over 80% – comes regardless of the more lethal effects of alcohol or concern about lives lost due to it. This year the sale of alcohol is expected to touch 6.53 arab litres – highest since 2016 (Dainik Bhaskar, 2020). If the motive were to ‘save lives’ – as is being proclaimed to justify the COVID19 lockdown – then the states’ move to earn windfall profits via alcohol sale runs completely contrary to it.

Not only the lives lost due to alcohol consumption, but even the immediate sight of crowds and queues of people jostling outside alcohol shops has made a travesty of the very same social distancing for which such a strict lockdown was imposed in the first place.

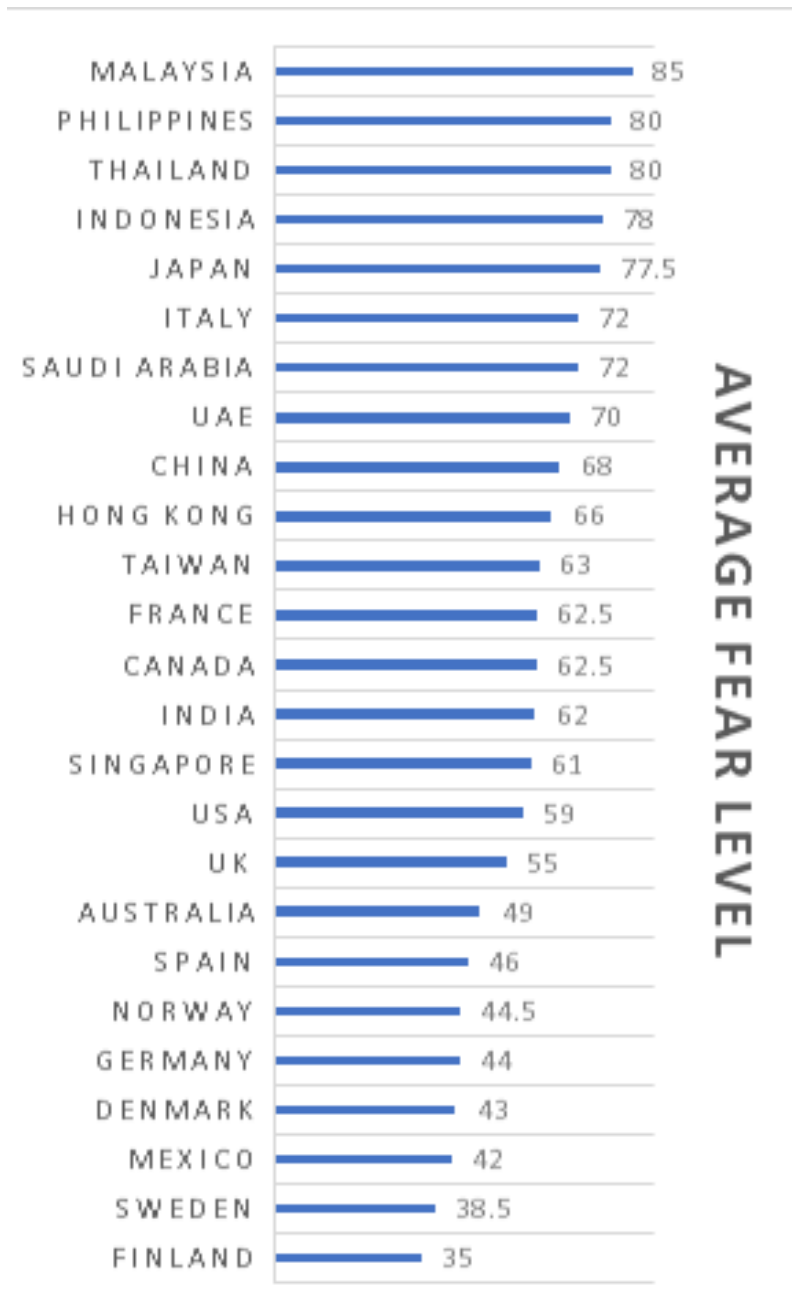
Curiously, ***the more the Indian government has insisted that India has flattened the curve – Niti Aayog has been insisting that India flattened the curve for more than a month now and even claimed that there would be no new cases after May 16th (Koshy, 2020)– the more the cases have seen a sharp spike. As of May 7th, India’s cases started growing at 6.8% – a sharp spike – from the earlier 4.8%***, due to states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Delhi and Tamil Nadu, which have seen a rise in cases as well as deaths (FP Staff, 2020). The first week of May has seen some of the highest single-day increase in cases recorded till now.

Despite India's dismal performance on all fronts, the Indian public has been so suffused with fear that majority of people would still like to continue with the lockdown despite a perceptible worsening of their conditions. According to a random survey of 1885 adults in Delhi-NCR region between April 23rd and April 26th, conducted by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), 82% respondents said they had suffered financial losses during the lockdown, with around 66% rural and 48% urban households receiving some form of ration or cash transfers. Despite this, **88% respondents supported extending the lockdown by 2 weeks, although, ironically, the number of people confident about not catching the infection stood at 76%** (much better confidence level than in the first phase of the lockdown) (Das, 2020).

In general, according to a survey,⁴ COVID19 has caused greater levels of fear in India as compared to the people in the western countries, but this level is less as compared to other Asian countries (except Singapore). Moreover, young people have expressed greater fear as compared to older generations (Bhatia, 2020).

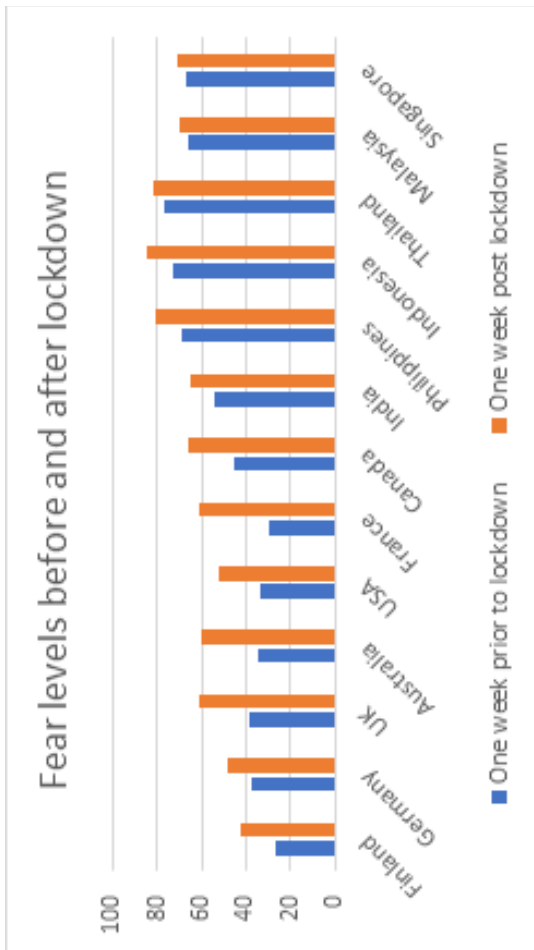
In India, large number of respondents were fearful not so much of the virus or of falling sick, but about access to essential goods like food and medicines. Also, the public in Asian countries has been more cautious and taking precautions than the public in Western countries. Indians, along with people in Vietnam and Denmark, also were more favourably disposed towards governmental response to lockdown than people in other countries, despite the fact that these three countries had a stringency level above 94.

⁴ The YouGov survey is being conducted and updated since February and offers a window into major reactions to the virus, at the level of public, mostly in urban areas with access to Internet. In India, a sample size of 7383 people has been covered.



Source: YouGov Survey

To further emphasize the point here, the survey finds that ***“In most countries, fear levels rose in response to the mounting case count and government efforts to contain the pandemic over the past few weeks. As schools and offices shut down, government responses ranging from mobility restrictions to complete lockdown may have accentuated fears.”*** These fear levels maybe due to fear of virus or due to fear of shortages and other concerns triggered by lockdowns.



Source: YouGov survey

Survey calculations indicate that across all countries fear levels regarding COVID19 shot up after the lockdown even further.

VARIATIONS IN STATE-WISE PERFORMANCE IN INDIA

State-wise rise in cases relative to the testing shows that while some states have shown improvement, in others the curve of infections is still rising.

Around 5 states – Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Rajasthan – contribute to nearly 70% of India's COVID19 cases. Maharashtra has the highest number of COVID19 cases. Both Maharashtra and Gujarat have a high death toll also. ***In Maharashtra, around 44% deaths are from the minority Muslim community, as of May 7th*** (*The Indian Express, 2020*). ***Indeed, nation-wide, crowded Muslim-majority localities in cities like New Delhi, Jaipur, Bhilwara, Mumbai, Nagpur, Indore, Sangli etc. have featured as key COVID19 hotspots***, indicating that their share in total number of cases could be extremely high (Swarajya, 2020). In Indore and Malegaon, the rise in Muslim deaths has been extremely high.

As of April 18th, according to government data, 30% of India's total cases traced their source to the Tablighi Jamaat event that happened at Nizamuddin in Delhi in mid-March (TNN, 2020). As of April 25th, 1 in every 5 cases of the total number of cases in India have been traced to the Jamaat meeting (Associated Press, 2020).

IMPACT OF INDIA'S LOCKDOWN

The impact of India's COVID19 lockdown, has already, and is further expected to take a heavy toll on the material living conditions of the people, economically as well as in terms of immense psychological suffering due to fear spawned by the lockdown.

Social Impact:

The fact that lockdown was imposed in a country where 'social distancing' is very difficult to achieve says volumes about the unthought decision. **More than 60% of Indians live in urban settlements, which include 4 of the 20 most densely populated and 21 of the 30 most polluted cities in the world** (Menezes, 2020). Rural settlements and slums are such that social distancing is next to impossible to achieve. Yet, the government did not think about any of these factors before going ahead with an ineffective lockdown. The level of fear and imposition of police diktat in some areas is such that, in places like Dharavi slum in Mumbai (Asia's largest slum), people have gone to ridiculous lengths to erect barricades in such a closed space where homes are cramped, unhealthy, stuffy and there is shortage of food (Reuters, 2020).

The first two days of the lockdown also saw movement of lakhs of migrant workers across the country wanting to go home due to shortage of food and cash, and due to panic triggered by the ongoing lockdown. Till as late as late April and early May, migrants in various cities – despite accessibility to food and other assurances – have been trying to go back to their villages. Or, some – like in cities like Delhi and Noida – have committed or attempted to commit suicide. **The reason is not money/food, but purely psychological fear, depression and suffering – the sense that, despite access to food/medicines, they would still like to go back to their villages in what they see as an unprecedented and unfathomable change.** Face-offs between authorities and migrant workers continue till date, especially in cities like Surat where there have been open clashes. The desperation is such that, in late April, police in Madhya Pradesh

stopped a goods trolley and, upon inspection, found that some migrant workers had sneaked into it in the hopes of getting back home. The special trains that have been started for them have seen huge crowds returning to their villages. In some places, ***the level of phobia, even among the common man, has crossed all limits of reason and sense*** – such as migrant camps in some cities of UP.

The lockdown has not only been stringent, but also inept. The result is that the suffering of people has increased, even as the so-called war against COVID19 has been a complete failure despite 40 days of total shutdown (the longest ever COVID19 shutdown), making India a loser on both fronts.

The critical question is why have the cases been rising despite the most stringent and longest lockdown (unlike in other countries). In itself, the lockdown should have reduced the number of cases, but this has not happened, indicating that there is another factor at play in India – unlike in other countries which imposed varying degrees of lockdown and managed to peak and control their cases within a month. This factor is the immense fear that has accompanied the lockdown imposition in India. In terms of practical implementation, all those countries which have imposed lockdowns and have been tough in implementing them by violating all bounds of reason have seen a steep rise in cases – such as, India and Russia. There are other countries also – Turkey, Ukraine, Bangladesh etc. – which have seen a higher rise in cases despite lax lockdowns, but these would likely follow the trajectory of reaching their peak cases soon enough. This, so far, has not happened in India despite the longest ever lockdown now.

Economic impact:

The immediate economic impact of the lockdown is evident and devastating. According to estimates by Japanese bank, Nomura, ***the lockdown has completely frozen around 75% of the economic activity. It has also caused supply chain disruptions and internally displaced millions of people.*** The lockdown has been catastrophic in placing the country decades back. According to NITI Aayog's own projections, the coming months will see 60-80% loss of output in airlines and hotels, 50-70% loss of output in automobiles, advanced industries and construction, more than 40% loss of output in textiles, logistics/freight, oil and gas and metals/mining, among others (Subramanya, 2020).

The coming months will see an adverse impact on finances of small and medium enterprises, on the employment loss, on the food supply chains, and livelihood losses. According to warnings by the International Labour Organization, ***India, with about 90% of workforce in the informal economy, could see about 400 million people of this country pushed into poverty*** as a result of this lockdown which is at the high end of various stringency indices, and has forced these informal workers to lose work and return to rural areas (PTI, 2020). ***The government is creating illusions for the poor through measures like miniscule money and ration transfers, even as nothing has been done for industries till date and those with rental and their incomes find themselves staring at a dead end – simply because only those who form a vote-bank can hope to be minimally considered for some relief.*** An irresponsible article by some young Income Tax officers in mid-April arguing for taxing 40% of the income of the rich and recovering COVID19 costs from them drew much consternation. While the government may have castigated them, yet, the event betrays the perverted socialist mentality of the

administration. It shows ***how the government officers are bent off finishing the industrial capital base of the country.*** Regardless of whatever may have changed in the country in the last 70 years, the administration – the backbone of government and the epicenter of degradation – remains woefully same, if not worse.

In the corporate domain, according to a survey by Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) of about 200 CEOs, about half of the CEOs surveyed expect up to 30% job losses in their companies across various sectors, with more than 20 million jobs potentially lost. The CII report also predicted a 80% demand contraction over the next one month which would likely continue for the rest of the quarter (Purohit, 2020). India's retail sector has, according to estimates by trade bodies, already lost US\$30 billion over the two weeks since the lockdown began (Purohit, 2020).

In the agricultural domain, the choked agricultural supply chains due to the closure of inter-state borders and country-wide exodus of migrant workers to their hometowns has led to acute shortage of farm labour for field activities and for transportation purposes. More than 90% of food supply chain – transformed since 1990s – in India is privately managed and heavily dependent on MSMEs. With this supply chain suffering a rude shock, the country will have to depend on disbursement of food from cold-storage FCI facilities, making our health further vulnerable.

In the domain of revenues, ***the government is also fast losing money*** due to this catastrophic decision. The ***revenue collections of the central government from GST have fallen by about 1.02 lakh crore***, having shrunk from 1.3 lakh crore in April

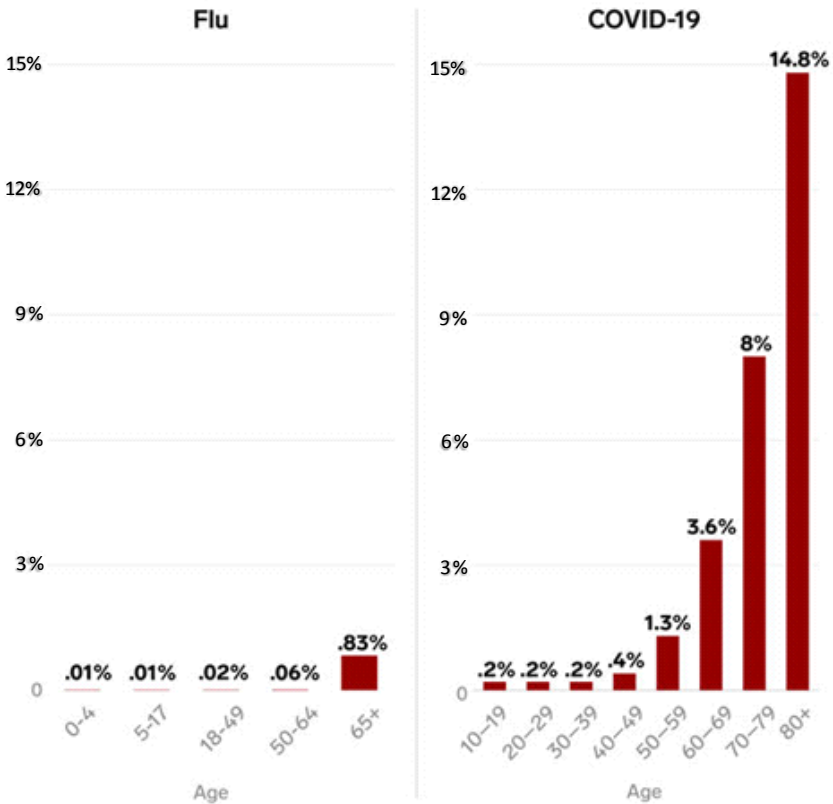
2019 to the figure of just 28,309 crore in April 2020, as per the government itself (CNBC-TV 18, 2020). The state governments are faring no better. With revenues from their own taxes accounting for just under half of the total revenues, they are largely dependent on the central transfers for nearly 47.5% of their revenues.

Of the total tax revenues of the states, over 90% comes from taxes on liquor, petroleum products, stamp duty and vehicle registrations. But with absolutely no vehicle or property registrations since the lockdown began, ban on sale of liquor and halving of petroleum sales, ***the own tax revenues of states have plunged drastically by 80-90%***. Further strain is being added as they are having to spend on health infrastructure, testing, quarantining facilities, transfers to the poor etc. (The Hindu, 2020). On top of this, the centre has failed to facilitate GST transfers, as the central government's own revenue collections and finances are fast drying up. As a result of this increasingly unsustainable lockdown, the same states – like Delhi – that were earlier pressurizing the centre to extend the lockdown have suddenly taken a complete U-turn and are now claiming that they will have to “learn to live with the virus”, with Delhi going for opening up and allowing usual traffic movement despite the ongoing lockdown.

Impact on Health and Overall Well-being:

Even worse than the economic impact has been the immense cost of compounded suffering due to **lack of availability of health facilities for other diseases** and overreaction to COVID19 compared to other conditions. According to the paranoia about COVID 19, it seems that deaths from other diseases are not so important to the bureaucracy.

Flu vs COVID-19 death rate, by age



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention

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While the fatality of COVID19 is higher than that of normal flu, across all age groups, ***Chinese scientists have predicted that COVID19 is here to stay and may keep coming back seasonally every year like the flu, and should be treated like a flu.*** Under such conditions, the only way forward would be to get accustomed to it and develop immunity. Policies like lockdowns urgently need to be abandoned.

Several on-ground reports (Dutt, 2020) have indicated that overreaction to the COVID19 crisis has led to turning of existing hospitals in many cities into COVID19 facilities, resulting in a severe diminution of the earlier capacities at which hospitals used to function. As a result, patients suffering from more serious morbidities – such as cancer, kidney conditions, TB etc. – are being turned away. Due to the unprecedented fear of the virus, there has also been a rise in cases of doctors refusing to treat patients who ordinarily come to them.

According to available data, the number of treatments for unique, critical non-COVID procedures by private and public hospitals dropped by over 20% between February 2020 and April 2020. Within this, ***cancer-related procedures dropped by 57%, cardiology-related procedures dropped by 76%, and, procedures in obstetrics and gynecology were down by 26%. Basic respiratory problems procedures (often with COVID19-like symptoms) dropped by nearly 80%*** and other emergency services of less than 12 hours dropped by 33%. Moreover, nearly 70% of critical treatments like dialysis and chemotherapy were being provided by private sector – there has been no increase in these treatments in public facilities, showing that both public and private sector are not treating these critical patients (Raghavan & Aryan, 2020).

According to doctors' own analysis, people have stopped going to hospitals out of fear. This shows how much damage and suffering is currently being wreaked on the majority of population. To understand the bungled priorities in India's COVID19 response, by way of comparison, let us take the case of TB which causes approximately 4.4 lakh deaths a year in India.

During the first seven weeks of the COVID-19 outbreak in India, the per day COVID-19 mortality in India was around 8,

while during the same seven weeks the per day tuberculosis mortality in India was 1,090 (Dogra 2020). It is likely that TB-related deaths will rise more due to poverty caused by the lockdown, as TB medication needs to be taken over several months regularly, requires free-of-cost medicines for the poor, demands regular supervision and close contact/motivation with patients, among other things. None of this is present due to extreme tilting of the whole health system towards COVID19. As a result, TB mortality could see a serious spike in India. **According to some estimates, in the 40 days since the first novel coronavirus case was detected in India, there would have been nearly 50,000 deaths in India from tuberculosis alone, if one goes by past patterns of TB** (Livemint, 2020).

Daily deaths data in India (from 2017) shows that top five diseases – two non-communicable and three communicable – kill around 11000 Indians every day (Livemint, 2020). And these are regarded by many as conservative and underplayed figures emerging from governmental data, with the real disease burden being much higher.

Table 7: Deaths due to top 5 diseases in India:

Diseases in India (top 5)	Daily deaths in 2017
Ischemic heart disease	4220
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	2626
Diarrheal diseases	1970
Lower respiratory infections	1390
Drug-susceptible TB	1045

Source: Global Burden of Disease 2017

Despite this, the overwhelming paranoia around COVID19 has made the current situation much worse than the situation during earlier such epidemics and coronavirus outbreaks. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Africa, the overwhelming of health systems resulted in more deaths due to non-Ebola diseases than Ebola deaths (Dogra 2020). The current situation is accompanied not only by reduction in health system capacity to deal with non-COVID-19 diseases, but also the unprecedented phobia accompanying it that has led to refusal to treat patients with other problems.

India has scores of patients for non-COVID ailments like heart disease, stroke, cancer, kidney ailments, diabetes, respiratory infections, maternity and child-birth related care and complications, serious injuries, other infectious diseases etc. They need emergency or frequent medical care which is sometimes possible only in hospitals. The prolonged lockdown and the phobia spawned by it in people's minds has created severe problems for such patients by making it difficult to access medical services and essential medicines (Dogra, 2020).

The general situation is so full of fear and phobia of COVID19 that, all over the country, potential patients – with emergency medical needs – have to obtain 'special passes' to arrange transport and other logistics to access medical services. Many times, despite availability of such passes, they fail to access the medical services due to inability to pay or phobia of doctors, resulting in deaths of toddlers, young and old alike.

Non-COVID 19 Deaths Due to Lockdown are Far Worse: The Malegaon and Indore Cases:

While aggregated data on deaths caused due to lockdown is not available and is not likely to be, yet sporadic cases have revealed how deep the damage has gone. In Malegaon district in Maharashtra, the number of deaths due to COVID19 is only 12, yet the district has seen a surge in non-COVID19 deaths during the lockdown period.

It has 580 deaths in April 2020 – compared to 277 deaths in April 2019 – and a 48% increase over March 2020 deaths. Some government officials themselves are blaming the locked-up private hospitals as the reason for these deaths, as people with other diseases could not get access to medical care in time and died. The level of panic due to COVID19 is such that even Maharashtra's State Health Minister admits that even people with symptoms of COVID19 are not reporting to hospitals (Shaikh, 2020). Private hospitals have now been opened.

Another case is Indore in Madhya Pradesh, which has had amongst the highest death rates in the country. Since lockdown began, there has been a drastic increase in deaths among Muslims. As per Indore Municipal Corporation data, in the first two weeks of April, the city has witnessed a massive spike in burials, but there is no corresponding spike from Hindu cremation grounds, despite strict containment in Muslim zones. Many of these deaths are not due to COVID19 but other diseases, due to lack of treatment at private and public hospitals (Chakrabarti & Agrawal, 2020).

Psychological Impact:

There has also been a rise in mental problems and suicides due to the COVID19 lockdown. According to data trackers, and partially available data in India, around 300 people had lost their lives due to starvation, exhaustion, suicide and other non-virus

reasons pertaining to the lockdown, after March 20th. The reasons vary – hunger, financial distress, police atrocities, etc. Suicides have been prompted by fear of loneliness, infection, lack of freedom of movement etc. (The Hindu, 2020). These are likely conservative and underestimated figures, since they are based only on collation of media-reported cases and do not include the unreported cases.

The real cost in terms of psychological suffering would be much higher and not estimable.

Environmental Impact:

One of the rare positive impacts of the paranoia around the COVID19 outbreak has been a palpable improvement in the environment, world-wide and in India. The quality of water and air has improved tremendously. Wildlife and birds of various variety are more visible and audible in public spaces, with the critically endangered Dolphins being spotted in Ganges after 30 years.

Delhi – ranked as the most polluted city in the world by the WHO in 2014 – has seen its levels of air pollution fall below 20 on the Air Quality Index (AQI). This is a huge difference when compared to Delhi's usual lower level AQI of 200-350 and higher levels (during the crop burning season) of more than 900. The average concentration of pollutant PM 2.5 plunged by 71% within a week after the lockdown (Goswami, 2020). Overall, nitrogen oxide levels, across major cities have dropped by 71% (Wright, 2020).

For the first time in decades, Ganga water in Haridwar has been classified as 'fit for drinking', primarily due to the ceasing of industrial waste seepage into the river, although in

downstream Varanasi there has not been much change in water quality of Ganga. However, all these environmental impacts are temporary and are visible as the result of keeping people inside and halting industries, rather than a deeper change of consciousness and approach.

Other Unintended Positives:

Besides an improvement in the country's environmental condition, there has also been a massive ***drop in deaths due to crime and road accidents, and a reduction in overall mortality.*** According to Kerala government, during the lockdown, compared to last year, there has been a 40% fall in murder cases, 70% fall in rape cases and 100% fall in cases of violence against women and children. Hospitals have reported a significant drop in cases due to road accidents, trauma cases and minor+major injuries due to industrial accidents.

In Telangana, there has been a 60% drop in crime rate during lockdown period. Uttarakhand has seen a 95% drop in crimes (including rape cases). In Delhi, the drop in rape cases has been 83% during the lockdown. ***As of April 24th, overall mortality rates have dropped sharply in India, bucking the world-wide trend of massive number of deaths, even as funeral parlours and hospitals had been bracing for a surge in deaths. This trend is in contrast to not just Italy, US, Spain, UK, France, Russia etc., but also some Asian countries like Indonesia*** (Reuters, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Under the current conditions, there is no or very little value given to the life of the people who are dying, not of COVID19, but because of the material conditions created out of the panicked reaction to it, in India. The government – based on its

short-sighted political calculus – clearly did not care to include these estimates in its cost-benefit analysis, since they, in their calculations, were not likely to yield the desired political returns. Illusions of taming the coronavirus – albeit through a series of rash fear-inducing decisions – and gaining political mileage motivated India’s response to the virus. Effectively, the obituary of the common sense in the nation – at least for some time – has been written by the government.

Unlike other countries which – despite high cases – have managed to control their situations in less than a month, India is still paying slowly, painfully and dearly for this continuing lockdown. The country is paying for a political decision that saw temporary value in fear, bringing home to us where our selfish politics makes us stand as a nation in today’s world. No matter how many environmental benefits the protagonists of this lockdown may highlight, the tragic caricature this episode has made of the country more than nullifies all these so-called benefits. The government’s recent moves of relaxing the lockdowns by arguing that India is out of the worst crisis shows that they are now, after having created a disaster, trying desperately to wriggle out of the situation without losing face.

Even as India finds itself preoccupied with this mess, there is a looming question on national security which has become too big to ignore. Having witnessed India’s overwhelming reaction to a virus and to a bogus scenario, we must now face the question of how the country is going to cope with much more serious national security and other challenges that will come our way in the future. Psychologically and materially, we are clearly unprepared to deal with them, and the country may be held at ransom anytime by any array of hostile forces seeking to satisfy their whims.

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THE INDIAN SPIRITUAL HERITAGE AND THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – 4

INTRODUCTION

I. THE PROBLEM OF DEVELOPMENT

II. THE ILLUSION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

III. A DEEPER PERSPECTIVE ON INDIAN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Development and progress are bandied about as the panacea of all evils of society. But what is their widest scope, the deeper implications and higher meaning, what are the psychological forces that push development? All this has been discussed and understood in a limited fashion, indeed only the surface has been scratched.

The driving force of a country's growth is the psychological push of its people which in turn is powered by what motivates them. In the modern era phenomenal results have been achieved by the concentrated power of nationalism – pride in one's country and concern for her well-being. An outstanding example is the transformation of Japan from a traditional medieval feudal culture into a modern industrialised nation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. When Russia was defeated by Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Russo-Japanese war, the rest of the world sat up in astonishment. No European country had been militarily defeated by an Asian one in modern times. Almost half a century later, as a consequence of the nuclear holocaust of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan was on her knees. But thirty-five years on, in 1980, Japan had one of the highest per capita incomes in the world and it was feared by some in

the West that if her growth continued apace her GNP might equal or even exceed that of the US by the end of the century. That potential was never realised as her people became more self-centred with the exposure to Western modes of thinking and their main feeder of growth – intensity driven by a certain selflessness – dwindled leading almost to stagnation. The current PM of Japan realises that without rekindling her national spirit Japan cannot be pulled out of the doldrums.

The Western gospel of utilitarianism, a selfish concentration on narrow aims causes greater and greater dysfunction in the various parts of society. Utilitarianism has been transposed into materialism and everything is valued according to its money-making potential. The quality of goods and services deteriorates even as they become more expensive. Medical care, education etc. are costing more and more while delivering less and less. Only the leavening of the spirit of nationalism has kept Western societies from sinking completely into the mire of destructive selfishness.

Until a few centuries ago India was one of the richest countries of the world (in 1700 the GDP of India was greater than that of the whole of Western Europe) and that too after centuries of repressive Muslim rule. But political unity, and based on it, the spirit of nationalism is relatively new to India. Throughout her long history she has been united culturally and spiritually but not politically. **There is, however, an even greater power, more enduring and free from the ultimate evil and destructive effect of nationalism, which can fuel economic development, even though being self-sufficient in itself, not expressly concerned with it. When an individual or a collectivity can rise beyond egoism, both its own and that of a larger collectivity – a nation or even humanity – and connect to its**

true spiritual self and can live in it to some extent, as ancient India was able to, then the power of this greatest potential begins to act visibly in all the fields of human endeavour. Once this power is aroused in a country there are no limits to her development. Not only physical development but also a psychological growth which can be the only true basis of happiness and fulfilment – witness the widespread dissatisfaction and psychological alienation and loneliness lurking just below the glamorous surfaces in modern materially developed countries.

Indeed, the problem has become so serious that the present top heavy material development, if not balanced, is poised to destroy all civilised societies in the world. True growth and progress can only be the results of an integral spiritual growth of consciousness whether of the individual or of the society or the nation. **The conditions in which people live are the result of their state of consciousness. To seek to change these without a change of consciousness is a vain chimera.**

In present times, India too has sunk into the morass of utilitarianism and in a worst possible way. As a nation, as a society, she seems to have forgotten her deeper well-springs of energy and has become lost in the chaos of conflicting narrow self-interests spiralling her into greater depths of depravation of every kind. A nationistic pride in the country and her achievements may be the lever to pull her out of this degradation and set her on the road to her true destiny – the intelligent will to live for the spirit not only individually but also collectively. Nationalism, which underpins the Modi government manifesto, can act as a bridge to carry India onto the path of integral self-fulfilment and enable her to play her true role among the community of nations. Therefore at present, Nationalism is our

one immediate and practical necessity. It was seen by Sri Aurobindo even more than hundred years ago when he wrote, “With us today Nationalism is our immediate practical faith and gospel not because it is the highest possible synthesis, but because it must be realised in life if we are to have the chance of realising the others. We must live as a nation before we can live in humanity. It is for this reason that Nationalist thinkers have always urged the necessity of realising our separateness from other nations and living to ourselves for the present, not in order to shut out humanity, but that we may get that individual strength, unity and wholeness which will help us to live as a nation for humanity. A man must be strong and free in himself before he can live usefully for others, so must a nation. But that does not justify us in forgetting the ultimate aim of evolution. God in the nation becomes the realisation of the first moment to us because the nation is the chosen means or condition through which we rise to the higher synthesis, God in humanity, God in all creatures, God in Himself and ourself.”¹

A. The Present Scenario and the Future Prospects

The above discussion was intended to provide a wide perspective on our present utilitarian gospel of development and its grave perils if continued any further. The important question facing us at present is that even if it is understood that a change of course is desired can we really do it? The answer is that we can and will be made to do so in spite of the fact that, at present, most of us are acutely concentrated and hell-bent on seeking somehow, anyhow, the satisfaction of our physical life nature’s natural animal appetites by the acquisition of the needed material means. This has brought the modern materialistic economic science to the forefront and all walks of life have gotten thoroughly infested with its destructive utilitarian spirit. As a result, like

everything else, the politics of the country too had (for quite some time) become – in the hands of clever unscrupulous actors in the field – a means of acquiring position and money through the misuse of political office acquired by winning elections. The natural instinct of the players in the political field has been to always look at and evaluate everything from the point of view of how it may be used to help them achieve their coveted object – the political office. To such a gaze it soon became apparent that, since Indian people were deeply divided and almost prejudiced when it came to their caste, creed (pantha or religion), language and region, this matter could be used to advance one’s political fortunes by appealing to such baser things in the people. Herein lies the origin of all the phenomena of reservations and all kinds of other entitlements based on one’s identity according to the above parameters.

Before the Modi government came to power in 2014, the “reservation card” was (and to some extent still is) being played to the hilt by all the so called “secular” – a euphemism for minority appeasement for votes – parties for their despicable ends. The new Prime Minister gave the slogan of ‘Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas’ (economic development for everyone) perhaps, to get the country out of the muddy pit of communal and social divisions which had become so injurious to the national spirit that giving vent to anti-national feelings began to be looked upon by many as the only sure road for gaining impeccable “secular” credentials necessary for getting minority votes. Till the last U.P. elections, the going has not been easy for the new government which – while avoiding sensitive nerves on reservation – had placed its stress on the service and development of all the poor people of the country. After the May, 2019, Parliamentary Election results, the country is witnessing a pervasive psychological movement anticipating the extension of the BJP’s sway to cover the whole of the country within the next few years.

B. What Now?

This series of the articles on development has been written to bring to light before all the discerning eyes some of the hidden aspects of the reality of the modern materialistic concept of Development or Progress (“Vikas”) and how an exclusive focus on it is swiftly leading humanity towards its seemingly unstoppable extinction in the near future. Now, the important question is: how should the attitude of the new benevolent Prime Minister and his government on his pet and cherished concept of “Vikas” be changed in the light of the deep and incontrovertible findings reported above about its perils? Before we proceed further on this it has to be pointed out that this question – which in our view has now assumed critical importance for the very survival of the human race – has never been relevant for us during the seven decades following our Independence in 1947. It has become relevant only now – and even assumed a great practical significance – when we face the palpable prospect of the country swiftly moving towards a psychological crystallization where an overwhelming majority of the Indian people – without any distinction of language, cast, creed or gender – will come to have trust and faith in the person of Sri Narendra Modi – something never even dreamed by most people till the coming of the May 2019 Parliamentary election results.

The wave of nationalism that brought Sri Modi to power and has been progressively sweeping the country ever since, has been – as pointed out before in the words of SriAurobindo – the practical need of the country since the beginning of the last century but got a chance to fully manifest only during the past few years. Now the important question for us is what form this new spirit is going to take? Is it going to take the form of Hindu

Nationalism as desired by some and feared by just as many. Here we have a very clear cut answer from Sri Aurobindo who wrote one hundred years ago, “... **We do not understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions. Hindu nationalism had a meaning in the times of Shivaji and Ramdas, when the object of national revival was to overthrow a Mahomedan domination which, once tending to Indian unity and toleration, had become oppressive and disruptive. It was possible because India was then a world to itself and the existence of two geographical units entirely Hindu, Maharashtra and Rajputana, provided it with a basis. It was necessary because the misuse of their domination by the Mahomedan element was fatal to India’s future and had to be punished and corrected by the resurgence and domination of the Hindu. And because it was possible and necessary, it came into being. But under modern conditions India can only exist as a whole.**”²

Now the important question pertains to the true form and force of nationalism suited to India. Again we have the answer in Sri Aurobindo’s soul stirring words, “I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatana Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatana Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatana Dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the Sanatana Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanatana Dharma it would perish. The Sanatana Dharma, that is nationalism.”³ And further, “**When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the *dharma* and by the *dharma* that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country.**”⁴

From the above quotations, to a superficial gaze it may

appear that Sri Aurobindo is contradicting himself by again returning to Hindu nationalism under the new label of Sanatana Dharma. To such a view it has to be pointed out that Sanatana (eternal) Dharma is not at all synonymous with the modern concept of religion which is a passing phenomenon in time due to its requirement of exclusiveness for its very survival. The Sanatana Dharma is eternal because, in it, all religions – Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. – can find their just place when they can be made to rise above their exclusiveness and intolerance. The Sanatana Dharma represents an all-encompassing approach to the supreme spiritual Reality without any exclusiveness – admitting even materialism and some kind of atheism – and its spirit is almost as wide as that of the universal nature. It is in this light that we may understand the following statement of Sri Aurobindo, **“Spirituality is India’s only politics, the fulfilment of the Sanatan Dharma its only Swaraj. I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of Western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to make nations blessed.”**⁵

We have come to our present predicament because, even after independence, during the past seven decades we have allowed the West to think for us and have been progressively moving towards becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of it. The pursuit of the modern gospel of Economic Development (“Vikas”) is leading us towards a precipice and still, because of the progressive westernization of our hearts and minds we have never ever been able to give any serious consideration to (or even suspect) the dangers underlying such a pursuit, contrary to the genius and the soul of this country. We have been doing what Swami Vivekananda had warned us against when he said, **“But mark you, if you give up spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materializing civilization of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which**

the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round.”⁶

The modern materialistic conception of development ought to be widened and, wherever necessary, superseded by the concept of development suited to India and, at this critical juncture of her destiny, even to the humanity at large. The only concept of development suited to the genius of India is the one which aims at the fullest and the completest possible development of all the parts of a human being – soul, mind, life and body – with a view to enable them to be ever more and more perfect instruments for the manifestation of the Absolute Divinity* – the one and the only true object of all manifestation.

Now, the important question is: how we may go about it? By itself, it is not any religion, philosophy, science or social and political system – not even all of these together – that can successfully carry us very far towards our object because nothing much of any enduring value can be achieved as long as man remains what he is. It is only an ascension to a greater consciousness that can enable man to change himself. It is only the pursuit of Sanatana Dharma that can enable man to ascend to a higher consciousness. The time has come to declare and succinctly formulate and effectively put forward this wider view of development before the people of India. This done, we can leave it to the genius of the spirit of India – the Sanatana Dharma – to accomplish the miracle of getting us out of our present painful predicament.

* This does not at all imply neglecting the material parts or their development as just the mention of word spirituality tends to incline the modern mind to think and fear. It is either not known to it or is easily forgotten by such a mentality that India has been the richest country – the famous Golden Bird of the occidental and Mesopotamian people – during countless millenniums before and during the Islamic invasions and even until the beginning of the eighteenth century during which the British began to establish their strangulating hold on the country’s economy and through (and along with) that on its body, mind, life and culture.

The upshot of all the above is that Sri Narendra Modi should and it is hoped will soon be in a position to lead the country towards this wider concept of “Vikas” (development) by putting the brakes on the march of the disastrous utilitarian psychological formations that have naturally gotten formed (the thing that invariably takes place) when we blindly sought for and pursued – as we have been doing ever since Independence – economic development in the modern materialistic spirit. It is a most daunting task to turn the wheels of such a materialistic march and can be achieved only by a still greater and rarer working of the divine Power than that which brought Sri Modi to power in 2014 and again in 2019. Such a power has to enter the hearts and minds of people and bring about a concentration of the national mind and Will on this task. When this is done, we will be securely moving on the way leading to the fulfilment of India’s true mission in the world which is to lead all mankind towards the divine Reality and thus be instrumental in eventually establishing the divine Life on Earth which is the one real aim of human life on earth as declared by Sri Aurobindo in the following momentous words, “The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man’s real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.”⁷

And this is India’s mission which is not to abandon this material life for glories of diviner existence but to bring God down on earth and uplift the earthly life by that Power. In the eloquent words of Sri Aurobindo, **“India has in herself a faith of superhuman virtue to accomplish miracles, to deliver herself out of irrefragable bondage, to bring God down upon earth. She has a secret of will power which no other nation possesses. All she needs to rouse in her that faith, that will, is an ideal**

which will induce her to make the effort.... The ideal is that of humanity in God, of God in humanity, the ancient ideal of the *sanatana dharma* but applied as it has never been applied before to the problem of politics and the work of national revival. To realise that ideal, to impart it to the world is the mission of India.”⁸

(Concluded)

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HIGHLIGHTS:

GOVERNMENT FORMATION IN MADHYA PRADESH:

The BJP – under the leadership of Shivraj Singh Chouhan – formed the government in Madhya Pradesh in March. This was made possible by 22 rebel Congress MLAs rejecting the Kamal Nath government, along with Jyotiraditya Scindia. The Congress accepted the resignation of 16 rebel MLAs after protracted political and legal drama, finally paving the way for Kamal Nath to resign and for BJP to come to power in the state.

EVOLVING SITUATION IN KASHMIR:

Even as the Indian government appears to have been full-time busy “battling” the COVID19 coronavirus, the country has been receiving a series of rude shocks in Kashmir. The recent killing of Army personnel in Handwara by foreign terrorists after a prolonged hostage-like situation and of CRPF personnel the next day, the lobbying of a grenade by terrorists in Pakherpora market of Budgam in Central Kashmir, etc. are just some of the wake-up calls for India’s deplorable failure to prevent the attacks.

The Handwara attack was particularly jarring, as it continued from afternoon to evening and involved civilians trapped in a house. Terrorists were also using communication devices during this encounter, while the Indian personnel were caught unawares at some point.

Prior to these attacks, in early April, there was a widespread gathering of thousands of people who had come to attend the funeral of a local terrorist, violating all lockdown rules. At the same time, there has been, since the last few weeks, frequent and unmitigated exchanged of fire with Pakistani Army and attempts by Pakistan to ramp up aggressive infiltration of terrorists into India.

Ever since the COVID19 lockdown began, the situation in Kashmir has been rapidly going downhill. While 45 militants have been killed between August 2019 and March 2020, more than 200 are still active. These militants have intensified their activity during India's preoccupation with the coronavirus. A new terrorist front – The Resistance Front (TRF) – has been claiming responsibility for recent attacks in Kashmir. In reality, TRF, the security agencies, believe is nothing but Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), along with other terror groups.

Recently, due to pressure from Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Pakistan has found a way of re-naming terrorist organizations, giving them political (rather than Muslim-sounding) names, in English language, so that it looks to the world as if there a genuine 'political' struggle for freedom going on in Kashmir, rather than an Islamic movement. This Islamic movement against India may have become stronger and more determined, as terrorist groups (unlike in the past) are no longer competing with each other, but have united under common fronts like TRF.

This is directly linked to the sudden emboldening of Pakistan and of Islamic terrorists acting against India. ***Most recently, Al-Qaeda chief urged Muslims of India to unite together and wage jihad against India.*** Currently, Pakistan is waging the war against India on four fronts – ground-level exchange of fire; proxy wars through infiltration and increased presence of local and foreign terrorists in Kashmir and by exhorting Indian Muslims in the rest of the country; cyber war against India involving epic and indistinguishable levels of fraud; and diplomatic offensive involving exploiting the gains made out of OIC's alienation with India. There is little doubt that ***Muslims have also become increasingly receptive to these***

callings – as evidenced through the anti-CAA and Delhi riots confrontations.

At all these four levels, India has been – so far – unable to answer back in kind. The tragic Handwara attack highlighted not only intelligence failure, but also raises concerns about the morale and preparedness of security forces in direct combat situation with terrorists. At every level, India appears to be deflated, even as Pakistan and its terrorists are exhibiting peak levels of activity and enthusiasm. India's uninspiring and struggling preoccupation with a small virus, the cowardly confinement of an entire country to their homes and the debilitating psychological environment this has created, has only served to weaken the country in front of its enemies, while empowering the latter.

So preoccupied has India become with a puny virus that the country has gone into an entirely delusional mode and lost all sight of the serious challenges threatening it at its frontiers.

DEVELOPMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN:

Developments in Afghanistan have proceeded at a fast pace and India finds itself a mute spectator to the unfolding legitimization and official expansion of Taliban in its neighbourhood. Afghanistan is facing a three-pronged crisis viz. political reconciliation between warring Afghan government factions, intra-Afghan talks between Taliban and Afghan government, and, Taliban-US deal.

In the weeks since the US-Taliban deal was signed in late February, the Taliban flagrantly violated it by continuously attacking Afghan government targets, even during the peak of coronavirus spread in the country. This is happening even as governmental deadlock in Afghanistan between Ghani and

Abdullah Abdullah is stuck, worsened by the fact that Ghani's Pashtun and Abdullah's Tajik ethnicities may further have a political impact through the simmering ethnic cauldron. Towards the end of April, the two rivals tried to reach a tentative deal, but nothing has been finalized yet.

Abdullah placed before Ghani a proposal that would see Abdullah lead the peace talks with Taliban, get 50% share of the government (including high ranking places for his allies) and would become the 'executive Prime Minister'. Ghani has not agreed to these conditions. However, it has been confirmed that Abdullah would lead the peace council and that a deal would be finalized very soon.

THE DELHI POLICE CRACKDOWN:

One of the key outcomes to have come out in the midst of India's "battle" against a virus is the opportunity taken by the Delhi Police to utilize the lockdown for cracking down on Delhi riots accused and anti-CAA protestors, both of whom were largely linked to each other through common networks.

While, during the initial phase of the lockdown, the investigations into the Delhi riots had slowed down a little, an intervention by Home Ministry required investigations to be speeded up. Thereafter, after early April, there were several arrests made in this regard. Till mid-April, more than 800 arrests had been made related to the riots, out of which 620 were made by Northeast Delhi district police. These are separate from arrests of anti-CAA activists, which included prominent names belonging to Jamia Coordination Committee and activists belonging to Leftist groups.

The Present Condition

Wherever one looks one finds individuals and groups infested with the “utilitarian” spirit and busy exploring and innovating new ways and means of somehow, anyhow, making some extra money. Men everywhere seem to be aiming for quick, cheap and easy ways and means for material success and solution to their problems, forsaking all higher values and nobler aspirations of their being. Education, medicine, business, administration, law and justice, everywhere it is the same story. **The result is that our educational institutions continue to supply degrees and diplomas but no longer provide any education worth the name; our doctors and hospitals are more likely to deprive a person of his money and body’s natural health than his disease; one must be a real genius in the art of shopping if one is to avoid paying too much and buying an adulterated, fake or a poor quality product in our markets. In our courts, justice may not be denied, but it can almost always be delayed indefinitely, for a fee. Our politics, government and the administrative machinery are increasingly taking on the appearance of a real nemesis for the country.**