

SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN INDIA AND USAGE OF ONLINE RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

Pandemic is not a joke to be used lightly or carelessly. If proper attention is not given, a pandemic can be deadly. Such a pandemic is COVID-19, which is generally found in Bat. As per the officials, the first case was registered in China in December 2019. The virus was officially named SARS-CoV-2 with a disease named COVID-19, which stands for coronavirus disease 2019, due to its origin in 2019. The virus primarily spreads through saliva droplets and nasal discharge of the infected people while coughing and sneezing. (BBC News, 2020). In this paper, the authors will discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic affected India and the response of the Indian Government on different fronts. The pandemic COVID-19 has gnawed its roots in India on 30 January 2020. The numbers have been increasing at an exponential rate since then, with more than 850000 cases as of 12 July 2020. India has the greatest number of cases in Asia. Indian Government is strongly responded to the Corona pandemic, but there are too many problems. The clashes with Pakistan and China were threatening on borders, the labor class problem, people going under depression and isolation. In this descriptive paper, all the scenarios will be discussed, and the government response will also be discussed for the same.

Keywords: India, COVID-19, Online Resources, Challenges.

BACKGROUND

Doctors across the world are researching to study the symptoms and develop a vaccine for the virus. Some of the symptoms may include severe cough, high fever and temperature, fatigue, breathlessness, loss of smell, etc. People are advised to be safe and stay home. If any of the symptoms are seen in any person, people are advised to get the test done. Symptoms can become severe, like blueness on lips and face, persistent pain in the chest, fatigue, and excessive trouble while breathing. In the initial phase, it was as normal flu, but with the rapid increase in the number of patients, the authorities investigated the matter and found that this virus took birth in Wuhan meat market, which sells meat, whereby there were different animals, was slaughtered on the spot and sold in the market. Thereafter, the Corona Virus spread with a great speed

worldwide and spread its roots to almost all the countries. (Health Line, 2020). When people were celebrating New Year 2020, the virus was planning to infect millions across the globe and give rise to an era of lockdowns, depression, diseases, and death. (Velantic, 2020). Corona Virus transmitted with an unprecedented speed and became the most popular headline over all the news channels. The news channels, newspapers, radio, etc., were just only covering CORONA. Every morning people wake up with questions like, what is the count. How many more cases? (World Health Organisation, 2020). Though the virus is responsible for hundreds and thousands of deaths, the recovery rate is also good—most people who get infected experienced respiratory illness. The main problem lies when people above the age of 65, as well as people who already have medical issues like cardiovascular problems, diabetes, cancer, and even chronic respiratory diseases, get affected. They are more prone to this disease and deaths. The transmission can be slowed down by being well informed and aware of the disease, taking preventive measures, and protecting not only yourself but others by maintaining social Distancing and quarantining. People are advised to wash hands frequently, wear masks, avoid unnecessary meetings and outings, use alcohol-based scrub.

HISTORY OF CORONA VIRUS

Corona Virus belongs to a very big family of distinct viruses. The viruses are responsible for the common cold in humans and even infect various animals like bats, camels, and even cattle. (WebMD Medical Reference, 2020). Many experts have concluded that SARS-CoV-2 originated from the animal bat and passed to humans in the open-air wet market of Wuhan, China. In that market, fresh meat, fish, and many other animals are killed there and then only to be sold to customers. (Kahn & McIntosh, 2020). The crowded situation provides room for the virus in the animals to swap genes and begin to spread the infection. As per WHO highlights, there have been more than 7 million cases of COVID-19 across the globe and over 400,000 deaths as of 10 June 2020. Though the situation in some continents like Europe is improving, however, it is worsening globally. The greatest number of cases were reported on 7 June, with more than 136000 cases being reported to WHO. Fighting with the disease is not easy. Experts even compare combating the disease as worse as World War III. The UN General Secretary stated that there is a condition of the global health crisis in which people are dying; there is a spread of human suffering and is affecting the economy harshly.

India and Covid – 19

The pandemic COVID-19 has gnawed its roots in India on 30 January 2020. The numbers have been increasing at an exponential rate since then, with more than 850000 cases as of 12 July 2020. India has the greatest number of cases in Asia. The confirmed cases breached the mark of 100000 on 9 May and 20000 on 3 June. The cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmadabad, Chennai, Pune, and Kolkata are the worst affected cities with having the greatest number of cases. (PS Gopalkrishnan, 2020) (Reid, 2020). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India adopted various innovative ways to fight the disease. The journey started with a travel ban from countries like China on 8 February, followed by a 14-hour voluntary public curfew named Janata Curfew on 22 March and #9pm9minutes. (The Hindu Net Desk, 2020). For Janata curfew, Narendra Modi appealed to stay indoors or in balconies while not crossing the Laxman Rekha of

their residences, promoting social Distancing to be the only weapon to defeat the coronavirus. The Prime Minister also asked people in his live telecast on 19 March to help in reducing the burden on the health system by avoiding routine checkups and elective surgeries. Covid -19 hasn't only impacted the physical health of the people, but also the mental health as well. For this, the Prime Minister of India appealed to the Indian residents to voluntarily switch off the lights and to light lamps and diyas for 9 minutes at 9 pm on 5 April to promote unity and spread a ray a hope across the nation. The concern regarding instability in the grid was handled by keeping the essential services like public utilities, municipal services, offices, police stations, and selected manufacturing facilities on. (TNN, 2020) (C Singh, 2020).

Modi even acknowledged the depressing plight of the economically backward sections of Indian society who survive on daily wages. With the complete halt on economic activities, poor people will be affected the most. For this, Modi encouraged people to take poor brethren towards the light of certainty. The shining of light to defeat the darkness was the sole idea behind this. The lockdown can lead to a very lonely experience paving the way for anxieties and depressions. This was assured by 'we, none of us, are alone; collective will of 130 crore Indian people with us in this crucial time of crisis.' (Livemint, 2020). Social Distancing is the key to break the chain of the spread of the virus. This could be done through lockdowns, rather than just implementing it; an experiment was done with a voluntary curfew on Sunday, leading to the least loss and making people ready for the real battle. This was accompanied by the gratitude claps for the corona warriors as they are the people who are the most prone to being affected. Still, they are working 24*7 for the safety of the patients and saving thousands and lakhs of lives every day.

This was followed by a mandatory nationwide lockdown announced on 24 March for 21 days. This was just the beginning of the further lockdowns; Lockdown 2.0 was announced till 3 May to be followed by Lockdown 3.0 till 17 May and Lockdown 4.0 till 31 May. The restrictions and relaxations varied in each phase of the lockdown. (Utpal, 2020). On 14 April, Modi encouraged the citizens to follow seven steps to fight with Corona. The steps included using homemade masks, taking special care of elderly people, protecting jobs, following the guidelines provided by the Ministry of AYUSH for improving immunity, and even downloading Aarogya Setu App for tracking your health. (Government of India, 2020)

TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS

Aarogya Setu is a mobile application, an amazing digital service developed by the Indian Government. The goal behind this was the protection of citizens during the pandemic. The application's design augments governmental initiatives by informing the people about their health status, chances of being infected, and the potential risk of the disease. It also advises people regarding the best practices to be followed to be healthy. It's an initiative to prevent the spread of covid-19. The application uses the contact details of the users to track the details of the people who have the user probably met and inform if any contact gets infected. It's the best example of prevention is better than cure; it helps to break the chain of infection and provide a digital shield from Corona Virus. The application asks the user to take a self-assessment test by analyzing the symptoms the user provides and the location information. This will help the Indian Government to be proactive and adopt necessary mitigation strategies. (Government of India, 2020).

BAILOUT PACKAGE

Also, Modi announced an economic package of ₹20 trillion to encourage India to be self-reliant. He promoted the concept of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat on 12 May in his live telecast. The package targeted the laborers, farmers, MSME'S, and handicraft cottage industries. He also declared, economy, infrastructure, governing systems, vibrant democracy, and supply chain the five main pillars of Indian society. (Mulye, 2020). From 1 June, the Indian Government took the bold step to unlock the country in three phases, barring the containment zones nationwide. India's response to the pandemic has been praised worldwide, especially by the United Nations and the World Health Organization. The organizations appreciated India's practices to be comprehensive and robust, with the lockdown restrictions to be aggressive, but the need of the hour. The restrictions were vital for controlling the spread of disease and building world-class health infrastructure. (PTI, World, 2020)

Problems of Common People and The Response of The Indian Government

The swift and stringent actions taken by the Indian Government with emergency policy making and even implementing it, urgent investments in healthcare on a priority basis, fiscal stimulus, huge investments in vaccines and drug research and development was noted by the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker. (India Today Bureau, 2020). India's enriched experience and capacity of eradicating outbreaks owing to its commendable performance at the time of smallpox and polio is noted by the Chief Executive Director of whose health emergencies programmed, Michael Ryan. Though many people appreciate India's efforts to deal with the pandemic, India's policies do also face a lot of criticism for an economic slowdown.

India is having a huge population of 1.3 crores with only one doctor per 1000 people as compared to 3:1000 in developed countries. This makes the task to control the virus a very critical one. However, schools, stadiums like Talkatora Indoor Stadium; Pragati Maidan has been proposed to convert into makeshift covid care centers. The huge population and rising numbers call for a proactive approach by the Indian Government, which was reflected in international and even domestic travel ban. Before the lockdown, the international passengers were screened and quarantined as preventive measures. Even with all these measures being taken, India still has a long road to go to become Corona free nation. With more than 850000 cases as of 10 July 2020, India still needs to work a lot to combat this deadly disease.

The Government of India also announced free food distribution during the lockdown to reduce the effect of lockdown, especially on poor and needy people. According to the Finance Minister of India, Normal Sitharaman, \$463 million supplies would be made available for the benefit of 80 million migrants. Even Indian Railways took the responsibility of providing free bulk cooked food with proper plates in the areas around railway stations through IRCTC base kitchens, RPF resources, and NGO's. (Zee Media Bureau, 2020). However, all this social service was being done by keeping social Distancing in mind. Prime Minister also announced that this free food service would be extended till November end. Even after such policies, Thousands of migrant workers had been fleeing to their hometowns and villages on foot due to the transport restrictions during the lockdown. (BBC News, 2020)

India is a country where a very high population is living on daily wages and had not enough savings to survive this lockdown due to Covid-19. The lockdown left thousands of people jobless and scarce of steady income. The whole amount of savings was used in surviving the early phases of lockdown. Migrant workers lived somehow in the months of March and April. However, when it extended to May, people decided to carry out journeys to their villages on their own. People started walking thousands of kilometers to their homes, barefoot with their families in the hope of better food and shelter. (Pandey, 2020). All the savings of the people were being used in paying rent in the metropolitan cities. The cities that have helped them to build and run turned their backs on all the migrant workers. Even the transportation services were suspended, which could have helped them to reach homes. The nightmare of dying with hunger and poverty forced people to start the arduous journey back to their hometowns with limited resources. Despite the lack of proper transportation facilities, people walked, cycled, and took the support of various odd means to reach their homes in a ray of hope. This left many migrant workers in a devastating state, going penniless and leading to the deaths of many innocent lives.

MIGRANT WORKERS' PROBLEMS

Migrant workers traveling thousands of kilometers included men, women, young children, infants, and at times pregnant ladies too. Despite various Government measures to help the poor and provide them with food and even encouraging employers to avoid salary cuts, countless workers were adamant about their decision to go back to their homes. Even the usual ration cards, which are only valid village level otherwise, were made valid nation wise regardless of the issuing place. Migrant workers were also provided affordable housing by the Government by converting the vacant Government-funded housing complexes. This ordeal left them so reluctant to stay in cities and even come back after the lockdown ends or the situation becomes better.

All this has worsened the already declining position of the Indian economy, thus, making the Central and State Governments look for provisions for motivating workers to stay or come back to cities to reboot the industrial activities like spending around 35 billion rupees on food for migrant workers and poor people. Even the finance minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, showed her concern for the migrant workers.

Amid this depressing phase of the Corona Virus, many Bollywood actors like Sonu Sood came out as the messiah for a lot of people. Sonu Sood is known to many of us as a great actor on the big screen; however, he emerged as a real-life hero and an angel for the migrant workers. He arranged for buses, railway tickets, and airlifting of numerous people. He helped the needy to reach their homes safely, at an electrifying speed. He also arranged for a 24*7 toll-free call center to reach the needy. His team is also reaching people through social media. (Vij, 2020)

In this Corona Virus, when everything seemed negative, all this gave a ray of hope. In the era of materialism, altruism seems to be lost. This act of humanity was appreciated by everyone around the nation. His compassionate act won the hearts of everyone by giving smiles to hundreds and thousands of people in times of trouble. (Kumar, 2020). People were encouraged to contribute to the PM CARES fund for helping the needy and revive the nation from this economic crisis. Various Bollywood Stars contributed wholeheartedly to this, like Superstar Akshay Kumar contributing Rs. 25 Crore and making various motivational videos. Thus, the Bollywood industry helped a lot in combating the disease. However, the Bollywood industry also suffered a lot during this pandemic.

However, The Bollywood Industry also Suffered A Lot During This Pandemic

During the lockdown, many Bollywood actors like Irrfan Khan and Rishi Kapoor left for their heavenly abode leaving the entire country in tears. Many actors committed suicide, like Sushant Singh Rajput, Manmeet Grewal, and Preksha Mehta. The Bachchan family tested positive for the coronavirus leaving the entire nation in a state of shock. (Rana, 2020)

Bollywood industry faced an upside downturn during this pandemic. However, despite these actors like Akshay Kumar, Kaartik Aryan used social media to spread a ray of hope in these depressing times. It may seem that India had a smooth walk across this pandemic; however, the reality was freely harsh. Where one side, people like Akshay Kumar, Sonu Sood, and even the local public were contributing at their best to come out of this disease; on the other side, India was facing some brutal events as well.

INTERNAL PROBLEMS

In early March '20, when the Indian Government has already banned mass gatherings, a coronavirus super spreader event took place at Nizamuddin Markaz Mosque in Delhi. This acted as stimuli in the increase of cases in the national capital territory. The number rose exponentially after this event. Over 4000 cases were confirmed owing to this congregation. Preachers and devotees not only from different Indian states but also from different foreign countries like Indonesia and Malaysia attended the event. After this, legal action was taken against everyone, and foreigners who attended the Jamaat were blacklisted due to a violation of The Foreigners Act, 1946 and Disaster Management Act, 2005.

As per Union Health Ministry, as of 18 April 2020, one-third of cases were linked to this. This Jamaat received widespread criticism all over the nation as it was such an irresponsible act by the attendees. (Radhakrishnan, 2020) (Joanna, Masih, & Shams, 2020). All this led to other casualties as well. A man was shot dead in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, for making remarks against the Tablighi Jamaat gathering. People belonging to the Muslim community were accused of spreading the coronavirus and being beaten up in numerous states. When unity was the need, Muslim people faced a lot of discrimination. Innocent people were humiliated due to some irresponsible ones. Social Media was full of outrageous comments against Muslims, naming them as Corona Spreaders. Muslim vegetables and vendors were mistreated in various states and were not allowed to enter societies. (PTI, The Hindu National, 2020)

Residents of Muslim households were attacked, and even Muslim nurses were molested and asked to go back to Pakistan. Various chats of Doctors and Politicians were leaked, claiming that they expressed hatred towards the Muslim community. Even Muslim students were discriminated against and humiliated. (PTI, Times of India, 2020). India proudly states of being a secular nation; however, due to all these Muslims were forced to convert into Hindus in some parts of the country. The freedom to follow any religion was disrespected because of the fear and hatred people have for Tablighi Jamaat is. (Bloomberg, 2020)

Apart from this, India was also facing the never-ending Tom and Jerry fight with its brotherhood enemy Pakistan. (Tiwari & Guleria, 2020) The hatred of brotherhood between India and Pakistan is famous all over the world. In these tough times of Corona Pandemic, India Pakistan tension did not pause. There was great tension at PoK in May and June 2020. Even China and India had tensions. Nepal was also extending its map, creating havoc between the nations. (Gill, 2020). India got an entry into United Nations Security Council as a nonpermanent

member without any opposition does not seem well with Pakistan Government. There have been angered reactions from Islamabad to threaten India for any misadventures at Line of Control (LoC). (IANS, 2020). Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi have threatened India with a retaliatory response if cast an evil eye. Even India asked Pakistan to reduce its 50% staff in High Commission to be followed by the expulsion of Pakistani officials. There was a similar reduction in December 2001. India does not see any relevance to maintain any relations with Pakistan as hostile activities by Pakistani officials. Even China and India were not having good relations during this period. Also, from Nepal's side, India was facing tensions. Nepal and India share an open border of around 1168 miles, out of which 98% of maps were finalized; however, certain regions like Lipulekh pass, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura remain contested.

Nepal and China were angered by India. India published its new map after dividing Indian administered Kashmir into Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh in November 2019; the map incorporated some of the disputed lands with Nepal inside Indian borders. This agitated Nepal and they published its revised map, including disputed regions inside Nepal borders leaving India infuriated. (Ethirajan, 2020). Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali declared that as international boundaries between any two nations are defined by bilateral treaties, the western border belongs to Nepal as there was no other treaty other than the 1816 sugali treaty. (B Pradhan, 2020). The Indian nation was facing a lot of problems besides fighting with the Covid 19. As India was in lockdown for more than two months, the Indian Government decided to ease down certain restrictions to revive the economy as well. For this, liquor shops were made open, which became a great topic of debate across the nation. Delhi and Mumbai are the worst affected regions. Still, the booze-loving citizens created a mockery of social Distancing and lockdown by not following any rules and creating huge havoc outside the liquor shops irrespective of increased prices. People bought alcohol worth thousands of rupees in one go. The harsh lockdown has increased the demand for alcohol. As soon as the relaxation was announced, there was an immense rise in sales. States like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu contribute a major part of all the liquor sold in India, and thus, alcohols form a major part of their revenue. (Biswas, 2020)

Even states like Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra saw a huge crowd outside liquor shops as a drop was not sold in April. The dire state of the revenue of state governments made them anxious and forced them to take this bold step of opening the liquor shops. Though this provided a relief into the drying lockers of the state governments, it may cause a rise in the number of the cases as no social distancing rules were being followed. However, India knows how to survive even in the toughest of times. At the same time, there were many problems with borders, political issues, migrant workers, etc. The corporate sector was converting challenges into opportunities every day.

The word Corona does not bring any optimism with it. Even the word Positive does not seem to be good news; rather, it's the most horrible fear nowadays. However, there is still a silver lining attached to it. Corona has changed the world live; the businesses run; the students learn. People were involved in digital payments and learning digital concepts at a faster pace. There was a time when businesses revise their digital strategies every year or so, and however, nowadays, it needs to be revised on a weekly or monthly basis. (Scroll.in in Partnership with Accenture, 2020). The world was already moving at a very fast pace, though lockdown has slowed down the economic growth; the digital activities have grown at an exponential rate. According to a European Survey, more than 70% of executives believe that the pandemic will stimulate the digital transformation. Indian bank Kotak Mahindra recently launched the nation's

first zero contact video KYC savings bank account opening facility. It enables the customers to enter their details and video calls the executive to complete their KYC process. The video call will ensure that the customers don't have to visit the bank and also helps to save paper.

The bank executive will carry out the required checks on the video call only. The customer will only require basic identity proofs like PAN Card, Aadhar Card, and a pen/paper. (Kotak Mahindra, 2020). Even going out and meeting friends and relatives got shifted to video calls. Companies like Facebook supported this by expanding the maximum limit of people to 8 during WhatsApp video calls. So, the banks have shifted their physical presence to an online presence. Even doctors prefer to provide consultation to their patients online wherever possible. Even retailers, supermarkets prefer to take online orders and deliver as contactless deliveries.

Schools and colleges are organizing online classes on various handles like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams, etc. The lectures are conducted virtually, giving rise to a whole new level of education. Even yoga, cooking, dance, and other classes are conducted online. The transformation came overnight and became the need of the hour. Those who adopted are still earning a lot even in these gloomy pandemic days. The office places were considered best for greatest productivity, however mandatory work from home became the trend. The service provider and even the service receiver readily accepted this change.

All this was taken as an opportunity to expand the digital horizons. COVID-19 has forced people worldwide to adapt to new ways of working. The management had to take a bold decision of going for mandatory work from home for all the employees when offices are broadly considered vital for productivity, developing organizational culture, and development of employees. Businesses have adopted videoconferencing as the alternative to physical team meetings. Indian Businesses, employers, and even employees have adapted well. Only the essential service providers still went to the physical office places; for the rest, their laptops became the new office. All this, in fact, increased the productivity of certain employees as they could work at the comfort of their homes without wasting any of their time for long commutes to reach offices. They were less frustrated and generated better ideas. Though the whole pandemic situation was a lot depressing for everyone, it gave a boost to family time, a work-life balance, which always remained a concern.

Pandemic forced people to wear masks every time they go out. Even the offices, schools, colleges open, wearing masks will be mandatory. The pandemic has changed the prior experiences whole together. Masks have become more important than wallets. People may tend to forget their essentials but will not forget the sanitizer. In a country like India, where sanitizers were only used by a very few lots of citizens, this change is a thing. Though implementing such a change in daily activities was a challenge in front of everyone, people took this as an opportunity. In the choice between living digitally and getting infected, Digitalization always had the upper hand. The way society and businesses are coping up with this pandemic will lead to a better tomorrow, a more advanced tomorrow.

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