Social Cohesion & Mental Health Crises: A Study of Indian Society Following COVID-19

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Abstract

The present research paper talks about COVID pandemic and its impact on the different aspects of the society. It offers a comparison of the current situation among different nations and tends to elaborate how the political structures of these nations play a role in the battle against corona. The paper advocates that intellectuals ought to come forward and facilitate a catharsis through literature and such. Girish Karnad has delivered many plays which offer an outlet to the surge of, emotions that tend to surface in such situation.

Keywords: cohesion, crisis, humanitarianism, psychology, sensitivity, sustainability, trauma.

Introduction

Mans have faced and sailed through innumerable perils and today, they stand in front of another one. Covid-19 has taken the world by bewilderment and has broken the knees of every 'developed' as well as 'developing' country of the world. Covid-19 isn't only a virus; it is an attack on the stability of the society and has multi-dimensions to it. The severity of Corona virus, intensified by the havoc created around it by the media, cannot be fathomed by looking at only one direction. The virus has destroyed the human resource and wrecked the longstanding institutions and values of society all over the world.

There is no questioning the fact that this virus is deadly and taking precautions is a must. However, the circus of fear that media has created around it is a problem bigger than the virus itself. The faulty dissemination of the information on social media and the consumption of this distorted set of instructions, guidelines and measures have highlighted a deeper-rooted problem.

India's Situation

In India, where more than half of the population lives in rural areas, one cannot expect the people to be aware and fully supportive of the western medicines. On top of it, being a developing country, India's healthcare infrastructure and facilities were certainly not prepared for a Pandemic. The plight of the thousands of infected patients lay in the hands of a poorly organised, unfurnished and inequitable health system. But the predicament in our minds tells us take a sigh of relief by looking at similar conditions of developed countries. Comparing the situations of different countries makes one question the desirability of democracy. If democracy means that people can protest against lockdown or talk about vaccines and remedies without proficiency or not co-operate with the government in its venture to improve the situation, is it really as great as theorised?

Global Situation

The rapid spread of the virus is also attributable to globalisation. The blurred geographical boundaries allow easy transnational movement of people and property and now, exchange of viruses and other diseases. It is important to understand that globalisation has enabled our access to same products, services, opportunities and losses but we still have unequal resources and capacities. A daily wage labour has access to everything that a rich businessman has but this does not mean that he can consume the same things. This inequitable distribution was drastic enough within the geographical boundaries but globalisation has worsened the contrast further. Inequality has always led to human predicament and in a time like this, when this inequality can determine your chances of survival, the predicament prevail even more prominently.

The hardships faced by middle and upper classes due to the pandemic are complicated. They are the ones who are trying to understand this anomaly and to find some form of stability and safety in it. The pandemic hasn't only emptied people's pockets, it has also disturbed the social balance and the social roles and relationships. All of us have been social distancing which has ensured a physical gap between relations but the surge in the number of suicides and suicidal behavior indicates that there is an emotional gap too.

Social Media

Connecting through social media isn't enough, human need intimacy, the warmth of relations, emotional support and security. In these trying times, people who were already too caught up in predicament tend to given up while others try to engage themselves in new ways. People are struggling to get a routine, a way of life that is compatible with the pandemic and this task isn't as easy as it may sound.

Effects on Women & Children

Women who were house makers are working double time and are robbed of their 'alone time'. Working women strive to find a work-home balance while handling the increasing demands of the family for their time. Men, on the other hand, are equally baffled as they cannot ascertain whether they should do the household chores and share responsibilities or protect their toxic idea of masculinity and oppress women and children more. Children have been locked inside houses and have almost forgotten what it's like to play outside. The elderly don't get to go to the temples and such places and meet their friends and are forced to stay home and feel like a burden to everyone while fearing the virus and abandonment simultaneously.

Migrants and Health Issues

On one hand, the Diaspora helped the nation with their contribution to PM Care Fund, on the other hand, there in flow from highly infected countries like Italy, U.S., Iran, Spain, U.K., China and the Gulf Countries, has led to spike in cases within the country. States like Punjab are at the heart of this problem with one in every ten-house boasting of an N.R.I. working overseas. During the early stages of Lockdown, the lack of scrutiny at airports, use of Paracetamol medicine by travelers to keep temperature under the prescribed range, avoiding screening, hiding travel history, lack of seriousness towards quarantine, self Page isolation and social distancing undermined the government's attempt to keep the spread under check.

Punjab alone witnessed the advent of nearly one hundred thousand NRIs in the January to March period of 2020. These NRIs started the journey back home only after Corona broke out in their host countries. Their fear of not being able to access medical help and being discriminated against the access to medical care under the already burdened health services as they are mostly blue collared migrants, trying to make ends meet, hastened their journey (Purohit, 2020).

Role of Literature

Literature is the best tool that intellectuals have to accomplish this goal. In addition to influencing the ideas and opinions, literature can also provide an outlet to the surge of emotions that surface during such changing times. Literature can normalise new social roles and relationships, elaborate the political shifts and help in analysing the economic crisis. As far as human predicament is concerned, plays by Girish Karnad offer catharsis and commiseration in unparalleled manner. His characters echo most frequent forms of predicament, i.e. identity crisis, estranged relationships, lust, betrayal and what not and that too in most subtle form. His play, Hayavadna, so aptly depicts human predicament as the characters are victims of social predicament. The play speaks volumes of self-agony, helplessness, ethical degradation, class conflicts as well. It is a story of two friends, Kapila and Devdutta, who are madly in love with the same woman, Padmini. Devdutta is a man of intellect whereas Kapila, a man of vigour. Both love Padmini, Devdutta's wife. Padmini body and wants the deadly combination of two. That way, all three is trapped in a peculiar complexity of human relationship arising out of identity crisis. At the end, Devdutta and Kapila fight ruthlessly and kill each other. Padmini performs Sati. None of them is able to get meaningfulness and completeness. The way, Girish Karnad has highlighted absurdity in accepted social norms is really remarkable.

Protagonist of Yayati, Karnad's first play, i.e. King Yayati is a perfect portrayal of an alienated modern man. Yayati marries Devyani, daughter of demon's guru Shukracharya. Later, he ties knot with Sharmishtha, Devyani's slave as

well. When it dawns on Shukracharya, he curses Yayati to lose his youth. On the other hand, Puru, Yayati's son, enters in marriage with Chitralekha. The bed that was prepared for them, became a vehicle of solemnising marriage of Yayati and Sharmishtha. Puru lost his youth to his father, Yayati. Chitralekha, who had no active role in all this, is left deserted, frustrated and finally spoilt as well. Chitralekha's suicide becomes an eye opener twist for Yayati. The haunting realisation of responsibility of his actions does not let him enjoy his borrowed youth. That way, all three become victim of trail of suffering and agony.

Tughlaq shows how perfectionism constantly demands of lethal combination of realism and idealism. In absence of one, other is unable to perform. Tughlaq is damn good at planning but his indecisiveness and inaction do not let his planning yield any result. That way Tughlaq is a real human figure of existential predicament. His idealism makes him to shift capital from New Delhi to Daulatabad as it would save his people from foreign invasions but due to his poor execution, planning could not materialised the desired way. He ordered for re-shifting which cultivated a living hell for his people. He wants to promote equality, justice and Hindu-Muslim harmony but ends up killing his own people brutally. In fact, he fails to change circumstances and they circumstances) change him radically. Ultimately, he becomes a divided self, one who plans to build a Utopian Kingdom of communal harmony and equality but lands into an endless trail of massacre. In utter state of helplessness he turns to God Almighty and seeks for mercy. This is true for all ages. When things go well, man feels he rules his destiny. The moment things turn different turn, man submits to God. While countering an existential situation, man should play the role of good participant and make those choices which can help him solve the crisis.

Conclusion

Most importantly we'll have to rely on the relevant information shared by CDC, WHO and affluent news organizations. Because the information gathered from social media generally creates anxiety. People get frightened and then anxious. Staying in this state for a long time may lead to mental ailments. Mental illness is to be understood and taken as seriously as the physical ailment. Problems like anxiety and depression require treatment before it's too late. Digital solutions are boon for people who are well versed in these but they're futile for a large number. These have to be modified wisely. Empathy, compassion and all-inclusive approach towards learning and living are the virtues that shall make the lives run in a coordinated manner. Poor no more are required to be looked through the prism of poverty. Rather the questions standing in front of them require to be answered precisely such as 'what if they fall ill, who's going to take them to the hospitals, will they be allowed the access to the hospitals' etc.

To conclude, Girish Karnad's *Heyvadana, Yayati, Tughlaq* are existential plays in true spirit. These deal with varied forms of human predicament i.e. sense of responsibility, quest for meaningfulness, insatiable lust, alienation, spiritual void and other human complexities in a remarkable manner. For Karnad, outer conditions are less compelling as compared to the inner ones. Rather outer complexities are unwanted product of unanswered inner ones. Man is constantly in a dilemma whether to please society by following established norms or appease instincts without caring for acceptance by fellow beings.

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