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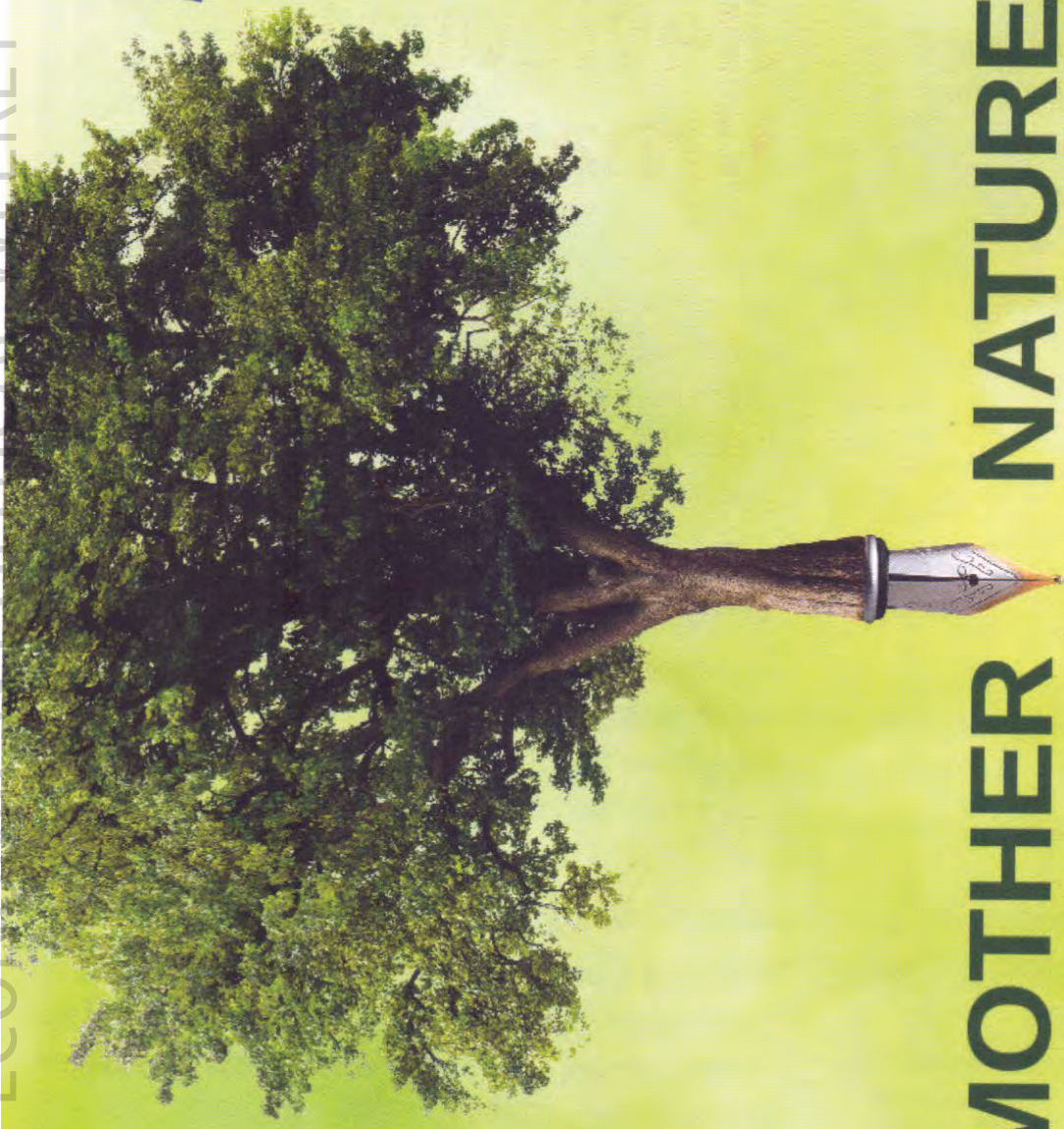
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Globalisation at Peril

The recent pitch by the Prime Minister to push swadeshi and Atmanirbhar Bharat to support local businesses has rekindled a worldwide debate on countering the forces of globalisation by adopting localisation as a measure for India's economic revival. The outbreak of an uninvited virus from China has not only crippled the global economy but has also muddled the global societal structure. Deriving a comparison with the Great Depression of 1929, countries are quashing their growth trajectories due to disruptions in supply chains and contractions in demand. Isolation, self-sufficiency and self-dependence seem to have become the order of the day.

Globalisation, which had attained worldwide acceptance for its benefits in the early 1990s, has also contributed to the creation of unequal societies with low growth and high debt. The outcome has been the upsurge of issues like the global financial crisis, migrant issues, Brexit, and multiple protests in countries like Hong Kong, Bolivia, Iraq, and Lebanon, among others, while the current crisis of COVID-19 clearly adds to the vulnerabilities of the same. The failure of globalisation emanates not from the creation of the crisis but due to its inability to respond and resolve.

On the business front, the creation of the buzz like “just-in-time,” “comparative advantage,” “outsourcing” in the name of globalisation paid off well in the past in terms of profits and efficiency. Globalisation served as a free hand for various capital-infused organisations to expand their presence and dominance while creating a network of supply chains. No doubt the network enabled free movement

of people, ideas, capital, goods and services but at a huge cost.

Nonetheless, overdependence on inputs from international markets has brought the supply chain to a complete halt, especially a larger dependence on China. The fragility of supply chains can be seen from the perspective of a global domino effect. For example, China is a manufacturing hub of the world, and it gets most of its machinery from Germany. As China is unable to set in the manufacturing cycle, demand for new machinery from Germany has reduced. This has further affected the German trade with the rest of the European Union. Thus, the interconnected world has certainly raised concerns on the concept of globalisation. The worst-hit industries are automobiles, electronics and, more importantly, drugs and medical supplies, which play a crucial role in fighting the pandemic.

Many scholars have expressed that overdependence on one nation and interconnectedness have taken the world to the inflexion point. They predict that from now on, the process of globalisation may change its course and multilateral organisations may have to restructure their bargain or become defunct. Certainly, developing nations will be the worst hit as they have always accrued the benefits of globalisation in terms of employment, investments, etc.

Countries may have to reassess their strategies to adapt to new realities, keeping in mind the stakes on the economy at large. Countries will be required to develop their economies in a sustainable manner going forward. This would lead to less dependence on imports, with an increase in the localisation of products, which would not only help in safeguarding the foreign exchange of a country but also gain better control over the

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national economy. Such a move can also assure better inventory management and less dependence on the supply chain, which reduces the transaction costs.

This may lead to a major shift in the approach towards globalisation and the rise of economies based on the norms of the regional social systems and security networks. If the situation continues for long, the global conglomerates may revert to their practices of the times when globalisation was not a popular word. Countries may be led to a tussle for economic and political power in regions instigating the rise of a new form of imperialism. The future can only be speculated. However, the current pandemic and the fight against it at every level have made countries realise the importance of self-sufficiency, which would lead to the invention of localised economic setups and less global economic dependence.

Amidst the confusions and beliefs, some degree of globalisation is inevitable. But, going back to the business-as-usual scenario highly unlikely. However, a sudden exodus from multilateral cooperation will certainly have greater ramifications that need thoughtful consideration. On the contrary, instead of a fall-back, it will be pragmatic for economies to restructure and prioritise. Targeted restructuring can reduce overdependence and push for better control in stabilising economies.

Globalisation is no doubt a necessary evil; however, the question remains if we are playing the right cards with it. Our focus was only to channelise the factors of production across borders that are very vulnerable currently. The world economies need to rethink and re-strategise in terms of agreements and opening up their borders.

S Subramanian, Meha Pant,
Ashutosh Srivastava

GURUGRAM

Rethinking Right to Water

Availability and accessibility of adequate water is critical for maintaining optimum sanitation and leading a healthy life. However, it has taken a global pandemic to make this fact evident. Maintaining adequate hand hygiene

is a prerequisite for avoiding the novel coronavirus infection; global advisories suggest washing hands with soap and water multiple times a day. But in India, where 163 million people do not have access to clean water, handwashing for 20 seconds becomes a luxury for some.

By magnifying the catastrophic consequences of an unsanitary environment, the current pandemic has reinforced the importance of availability of adequate water for personal hygiene. Concomitantly, it has also problematised India's interpretation of the right to water, an interpretation that subsequently informs the state's policies to address water scarcity. Whilst the Constitution does not readily provide the right to water, the Supreme Court has read it within the right to life. Apart from conceiving it as a general entitlement to drinking water, available to all persons, the content of the right is far from certain. The pandemic problematises this rendition on two counts.

First, it challenges the narrow interpretation of the right as an obligation to provide water for drinking. Initially, the Supreme Court treated the provision of unpolluted water as a prerequisite to fulfilment of the right to life. However, subsequent decisions focused only on the provision of unpolluted drinking water as pivotal to improving public health. Unfortunately, this narrow interpretation has also paved its way into government policy. The recent Jal Shakti Abhiyaan, an ambitious programme launched to address water scarcity in India, targets the provision of piped drinking water to all by 2024. Pertinently, this rendition of the right to water by the Indian judiciary fails the United Nation Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No 15, which conceives the right as a universal entitlement to adequate water for personal and domestic use, including personal sanitation. Undoubtedly, clean drinking water is essential to nurturing public health.

However, so is water for maintaining personal hygiene and sanitary living conditions, particularly in the current scenario. Consequently, limiting the entitlement to water for drinking purposes is counterintuitive.

Second, the concerns about the universal access to water guaranteed by the right has resurfaced in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Philippe Cullet has argued that a prerequisite for securing universal entitlement is the provision of free water, particularly in India where an overwhelming majority of the population is poverty-stricken. However, since General Comment No 15 does not envision the provision of free water, this argument has been a contended one. That said, the Indian government has provided free water through community infrastructure for several decades, except in cases where water is supplied through individual connections, that is, through pipelines to individual houses. However, with the nationwide lockdown and suspension of economic activities, for several daily wage earners located in cities, even drinking water became economically inaccessible. Consequently, in the current scenario, it is essential that the state provides free water, regardless of whether it is a community source or an individual piped connection. In fact, to ensure effective social distancing, the focus should be on expanding the network of individual water connections. If economic drudgery caused due to the lockdown is precluding certain sections of the population from securing access to water, it undermines the universality of the right.

The argument that we should revisit and rethink a more comprehensive entitlement under the right to water is a long-standing one. However, the pandemic has revealed an urgent necessity to do so, disregarding which could be life-threatening.

Kanika Jamwal

SONIPAT

EPW Engage

The following article has been published in the past week in the EPW Engage section (www.epw.in/engage).

- (1) Changes to Labour Laws by State Governments Will Lead to Anarchy in the Labour Market — *K R Shyama Sundar and Rahul Suresh Sapkal*

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A Dilemma for the Government

The response to the pandemic has aggravated both the economic as well as the health crises.

After a prolonged lockdown of close to three months, which started on 24 March 2020, there does not seem to be any clarity within the government on when to unlock the economy, and that is because the COVID-19 curve for India is still at some distance from its peak.

Not only has the lockdown not managed to control the pandemic, it has inflicted severe economic loss in terms of jobs, lives and livelihoods of a vast majority of Indians, particularly the poor and the vulnerable. It is yet another case where those who are the least responsible for a problem are made to suffer the most. Unlocking without a counter health strategy in place would be at the risk of infections rising at an alarming rate. But, a prolonged lockdown would be at the risk of huge unemployment for a long period, coupled with distress-driven loss of lives and livelihoods.

The lockdown has led to a colossal waste of economic resources. Unemployment, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data, increased more than threefold during the lockdown with an open unemployment rate of a whopping 26%. The burden of unemployment fell disproportionately on women, with four out of every 10 employed losing their jobs during the lockdown as against three out of 10 employed among men. It is not just unemployment that women workers had to face during the lockdown, there have also been an increase in cases of domestic violence. The axe fell on Dalits too, whose employment declined by 36% as opposed to 23% among the upper castes.

The plight of the migrant workers compounds this misery. In terms of access to income and food, according to the Stranded Workers Action Network, about 78% of stranded workers have not been paid during the lockdown, with half of them having less than just a day of rations as on 26 April 2020.

Apart from high open unemployment, the people who have suffered the most are the self-employed and casual workers, constituting 77% of the total workforce, with median monthly earnings of ₹8,000 and ₹5,000, respectively. For most, these numbers would have fallen to zero as a result of the closure of the economy. With these levels of income, the likelihood of them having enough savings to survive three months is quite low.

This heavy unemployment and loss of livelihoods came against the backdrop of a severe economic slowdown for eight straight quarters even before the COVID-19 crisis began. Credit growth, the bellwether of economic activity, has been on a

sharp decline since November 2018. There is going to be a sharp decline in output in the first quarter of FY 2020–21 resulting from the economy coming to a grinding halt during the lockdown period. One obvious signal of this decline is the index of industrial production, which fell sharply across sectors in March 2020. So, a severe supply disruption has come riding on a prolonged aggregate demand slowdown, a deadly combination for an economic crisis. In all likelihood, there is going to be a contraction of output in this financial year, which many institutions, including the World Bank, have predicted for India. Even if the lockdown is lifted, the economy cannot come back to life just like that, particularly for an economy that is facing a structural crisis rather than a mere cyclical slowdown.

What are the sources of this structural crisis? Rural demand is by far the most important factor that has kept the aggregate demand low during the pre-COVID-19 crisis period. The average agricultural growth during the Narendra Modi government years (including the second term with the second advanced estimates taken into account) has been 2.8% as opposed to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-II's term when it was 4.3%. Rural real wages—agricultural and non-agricultural alike—have been almost stagnant during this regime and have declined in absolute terms since April 2019. Since the post-lockdown data is not available, it is anybody's guess that these would have fallen further. With rural demand being low and no counter-acting force, the demand for industrial commodities has also suffered, which shows in its degree of capacity utilisation being at its lowest since the UPA-I years. This affects the income in the urban areas, both in the organised and unorganised sectors, since they are driven by industrial production. This situation of low demand could have been mitigated (in the absence of government intervention) if there were external demand, but that has plummeted even more drastically as a result of the global slowdown.

Unfortunately, the Modi government's response has been grossly inadequate, despite the tall claims to the contrary. The Atmanirbhar package, which claims to be 10% of the gross domestic product, actually has only 1.5% of the substantial fiscal expenditure, with the rest 8.5% in the form of liquidity injection and loan guarantees, which are all at best indirect measures to potentially push up investment. Any amount of injection of credit

is not going to increase private investment, which is demand constrained and not credit constrained currently.

There have been two successful models of fighting the pandemic. One, which South Korea attempted, is mass testing, tracing and isolating without a lockdown, and the other is what China, Vietnam, or, closer home, Kerala implemented, that is, a region-specific micro

level lockdown with aggressive health measures to control the spread. India seems to have adopted the worst combination of a macro lockdown with micro testing that was bound to fail.

What is required at this stage, if we seriously want to address the twin crises, is taking a balanced position that treats both the crises equally and develops measures to address both simultaneously.

Neighbours in Strife

India and Nepal should resolve their border dispute through diplomacy and negotiations.

India–Nepal relations are in the limelight, but for the wrong reasons. Both countries have entered into a dispute that has flared up once again over a territory that has mostly remained out of public view. On 8 May 2020, the defence minister of India inaugurated an 80-kilometre (km) road going up to the Lipulekh pass—the trijunction of India, China, and Nepal. India, for various reasons—“strategic, religious and trade”—considers this high altitude road important. From the Indian point of view, it facilitates connectivity until the China border and cuts down considerably the travel time of the Kailas–Manasarovar Yatra. However, the question remains as to what was the urgency to digitally inaugurate a still incomplete road at a time when India is struggling with the COVID-19 crisis, and moreover, when it had already entered into a conflict with another neighbouring country. The news of the Chinese incursion and scuffles breaking out between the troops of the two countries in Ladakh was filtering in from 5 May.

Both India and Nepal lay claim over the Kalapani region. Under the Sugauli Treaty of 1816, the areas falling east of Kali river were to belong to the Kingdom of Nepal and west of the river formed the Kumaon region of British India. The origin of the river, however, remained a matter of mutual discord. Nepal maintains that the headwaters lie in Limpiyadhura mountains, hence claiming the entire stretch downwards as theirs. India claims that the river originates from down south in Kalapani, hence the name Kali, and thus, it is from here that the treaty applies. It has considered this area as part of Pithoragarh district in Uttarakhand. Nepal had so far claimed 35 square (sq) km of Kalapani area. However, it is now officially staking a claim on a 370 sq km area comprising Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani.

This disagreement has surfaced time and again. It came to the fore earlier in 2019 when, in a newly published map, India included the disputed area within its borders. In 2016, Nepal again showed its displeasure when India and China entered a bilateral treaty for trade through the Lipulekh pass. It also raised the issue after the Mahakali Treaty of 1996 with India that envisaged the Pancheshwar multipurpose hydro project over the Kali river. It was subsequently agreed in 2014 that the matter would be resolved through discussions at the foreign secretary level meetings. This has not happened so far. During the current conflict, while India deferred such a meeting until the pandemic passes, Nepal, despite showing inclination for it, went ahead with what India has called as “unjustified cartographic assertion.”

Mutually cooperative relationships are the basis of survival in difficult mountain terrains. Villagers on both sides of the border do

not live divided lives. In fact, they share sociocultural similarities and relations. On both sides, they have been left in want of the government’s attention in terms of region-specific development initiatives. In fact, due to open borders, often the relationship between the two sides is described as that of *roti–beti*, that is, sharing bread and marital bonds. The footbridges over Kali river connect people who use the markets on either side. Students from Nepal cross over for tuitions to the Indian side and Indians use Nepali network for phone and radio, with poor connectivity existing on their side. Both countries are a source of remittance for each other.

In such a scenario, the dispute gets further flared up, perhaps due to political compulsions and sometimes irresponsible statements. The Indian Army chief’s contention that Nepal raised the dispute at the “behest of an external force,” referring to China, was answered with a jibe by the Nepal Prime Minister that the “Indian virus looks more lethal than Chinese.” Nepal since then has released a new map that includes all the disputed territories, and had gone ahead with its efforts to legitimise it through a constitutional amendment. A staunch anti-India stance has strengthened the current Prime Minister’s waning popularity and political position. This sentiment took deeper roots in Nepal after India publicly expressed its dissatisfaction with the new Nepal constitution in 2015, and extended “tacit support” to a five-month-long blockade halting supplies to the landlocked country. During the present quandary, facing serious challenges from within the party, the Prime Minister’s “nationalist” stand, looking more justified due to India’s unrelenting approach, has given him a new lease of political life.

India and Nepal share vast open borders. Rivers demarcate many hundred of kilometres of these borders, even though they are not known to follow borders. Being rivers, they keep changing their courses, giving rise to territorial disputes. It is indeed ironical that under the same political leadership in India and Nepal, the 5,040 megawatt Pancheshwar dam on the Kali river, the world’s tallest, and slated to submerge and adversely affect a land mass not less in comparison with the contested area, was pushed for. This also raises a question about how the modern nation states are looking at their ecology and people striving at the boundaries. Their unresolved and long-standing border issues cannot have quick and hardline nationalist solutions. What is needed is the sustained process of negotiations and more equal bilateral relations that would involve not just security and trade concerns, but encapsulate such a distinctive and multifaceted relationship that India and Nepal share.

Subterranean Politics of Generosity

The “gesture of generosity” has undeniably been visible in the public sphere when the novel coronavirus crisis is causing devastation to people. The act of generosity may be judged as an activity that has an inherent quality of being innocent; innocence on the grounds that it is not motivated by the politics of achieving personal or party interests. Thus, any efforts made by either an individual or organisations to support the most adversely affected people, particularly the migrant labourers at this moment, are considered to be conspicuously voluntary, and thus, beyond the sphere of narrow political inclinations. Arguably, it is the moral force that is constitutive of the “virtue” of generosity. It is the element of virtuosity that can possibly assign a distinct moral advantage of innocence to the act of generosity.

Such a manifest “gesture of generosity,” however, has led to political debate, if not controversy, involving some of the spokespersons of the Government of Maharashtra. Doubts were cast about the innocence of such an act.

However, such gestures do have unintended consequences to the extent that they lead such spokespersons to believe that such gestures do cast aspersions on the administrative ability of the government to reach out to the needy people in time. It is generally true that the act of generosity starts working when the welfare state finds itself in a crippling position to deliver on the distributive functions. Put differently, an “active welfare state” with an abundance of resources would eliminate the need for generosity.

In an unusual circumstance, such as the current crisis, has pushed the possibility of solution or redressal much beyond the capacity, calculation and imagination of the state. It is this unusual circumstance that has created the background condition for philanthropic activism. The limits of both the central as well as state governments are further exposed by the directives issued by the Supreme Court, which has made some stunning interventions regarding the plight of the migrant workers. The Court’s interventions also reflect on the misplaced emphasis by political actors who seek to prioritise politics of capturing electoral power over the ethical responsibility to address the distress of the migrant labourers and fight the coronavirus crisis.

We still need to sort out basically two important questions. First, is it possible to disentangle an act of generosity from politics? Or does philanthropic activism operate at the subterranean level? Second, how effectively and adequately philanthropic activism can address the question of workers’ dignity?

The act of generosity may operate at the subterranean level in ways that are not always obvious. It could be argued that such an act may not be devoid of politics.

Philanthropic persons may not demand from the recipient of generosity a public acknowledgement of such gestures. However, they can indirectly command such public recognition of help from the beneficiaries of the philanthropic activism. The act of commanding recognition is necessarily driven by hegemonic spells of gestures, which make use of moral coercion redundant. This is because the beneficiaries of generosity **do** come forward spontaneously and publicly acknowledge the help that they receive from the help giver. The ethics of giving help may not form the part of the original scheme of a philanthropist, but it is likely to be mired in subtle forms of politics that are based on the unequal social relationship between the donor and the recipient of help.

Since philanthropic activism is based on the perpetual asymmetry between the help giver and help receiver, such activism addresses only the aspect of reducing human suffering and thus restoring surviving value to human life; life that is secured by such help. This is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition to possess a moral good such as dignity. The dignity of human beings does not flow from external help but from an inner sense of self-worth. Assigning worth to oneself results from the power of labour. But such a transcendental leap into the higher regions of dignity as mentioned above cannot be explained merely with the aid of philanthropic activism.

Dignity, which takes human beings into the higher moral region, can be obtained through the creative investment of labour. The value of labour acquires dignity when it is obtained from the employer’s acknowledgement that the workers are not a liability but an asset. That they do not ride on someone’s gesture of generosity.

The employers, for example, from Punjab, Maharashtra and Karnataka are keen to invite the workers back into these states. But such an invitation presupposes only a notional or hypothetical condition within which the workers can realise their self-worth. The workers will have to categorically state that they have a moral right to dignity. And such rights have to be protected both by the private employers and the state governments by providing a dignified quality of life. One is expecting the employers to learn appropriate lessons from the present crisis that has caused devastation to the lives of millions of workers.

Utpal Kumar

FROM 50 YEARS AGO

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Short Walk to Long War

The American intervention in Vietnam has been one long exercise in wishful thinking. It displays a long, dreary list of short-cuts which have failed to pacify Vietnam. Was Nixon’s

decision to invade Cambodia yet another attempted short-cut to end the war in Vietnam? Some political observers maintain that Nixon is cynical enough to have decided that the Vietnamisation programme was going badly and, seeing that there was no prospect of American withdrawal without handing over Vietnam to the Vietcong, calculated that the only way to go back on his pledges of a phased American withdrawal was to expand the war into Cambodia. This would give him a plausible excuse to keep

American forces in Vietnam at least till the Presidential election in 1972.

This theory could be valid, but looking at the pattern of American failure in Vietnam, it is more than likely that the American Administration supplied with the usual, optimistic, quick-kill advice of their military advisers, saw the overthrow of Sihanouk as a heaven-sent opportunity to wipe out Vietcong strongholds in Cambodia and, hopefully, inflict a grievous and possibly mortal blow to Vietcong operations in Vietnam.

Exiting the Lockdown Sustainably

AVINASH PERSAUD

Exiting the lockdown before a vaccine is available or herd immunity is in effect is a problem, especially because it appears that up to 50% of people with COVID-19 could be asymptomatic—they could have and carry the disease without symptoms. In the *British Medical Journal's* review of data on infections in Wuhan, China and other studies of the data from Italy, 78% of carriers were asymptomatic. The only way of identifying asymptomatic carriers would be through widespread testing or contact tracing. Exiting the lockdown in the presence of asymptomatic people before a vaccine or herd immunity will send us back into lockdown, again and again.

Not exiting the lockdown is a problem too. No amount of drama in the economic statistics—a doubling of unemployment in a few weeks, 100% declines in government revenues or revenues in travel-related sectors, a contraction of the global economy—describes the stark reality that a vast majority of the population in developing countries do not have the savings to survive without income for even short periods. Not all countries are like Norway. While the bloody protests in the United States reflect deep iniquities, it would be hard to conjure up circumstances more likely to tear apart the social fabric of our societies than to make a large part of the population unemployed and hungry and take away their everyday freedoms.

There is an essential psychological and time dimension too. The Brits may invoke the spirit of “Dunkirk” at the beginning of the first lockdown, but not after repeated, prolonged lockdowns and depressing uncertainty as to when or if this will change. Dunkirk occurred right at the beginning of the war, not amid its destruction. No wonder, then, that the prospect of

opening up is being greeted with relief and not much analysis.

There is a clue as to what we need to do to live with COVID-19, before a vaccine is made available. Many of those most vulnerable to falling off the social, economic, and psychological edge because they are now incapable of providing for themselves and their loved ones are often those least likely to have complications from catching COVID-19—the young and healthy. Many of those we need to protect, the elderly and sick, are often those least affected by a lockdown because they were not working full time. Some are still receiving their pension cheques. Further, forcing families to remain in small spaces, near the old or with those who need psychological outlets, may create new risks. Lockdown is a blunt instrument.

To lockdown or “open up the economy” is a false dichotomy. More useful distinctions are between (i) people who are predominantly safe and those who are at risk, and (ii) activities that are predominantly safe and those that are risky. We need to exit the lockdown after a period long enough to see those with symptoms, treat and isolate them, and carry out contact tracing. But we can only sustainably exit the lockdown by ensuring that (i) safe people are doing safe things in safe ways, and (ii) people at risk are shielded and remaining in safe places, doing only safe things. Within these two guard rails, a significant amount of economic activity can return, saving jobs, livelihoods, and the revenues necessary to provide the essential services society needs.

This exit plan is what we are doing in the Caribbean. The region has been devastated economically, but has had a good lockdown health-wise, and is destined to have a good return. The plan requires three things.

First, we need a way of identifying safe people and those at risk. We can do this through a combination of identifying the safest population segments and testing them. Yes, we need sufficient test kits and modalities of testing and perhaps certification. But, besides those with existing respiratory issues, the latest data suggests that key risk factors are age (the over 65s) and being overweight (a body mass index of over 40), two risk factors that are easy to screen.

Second, we need to lay down the criteria of a safe activity, in particular, physical distancing and wear protocols, hygiene practices, and limiting points of human contact with vulnerable people. It may be possible to make much of what we do safe using protocols and technology. We would need to consider how this is monitored and enforced.

Third, we need to ensure that safe people are doing safe things in a safe way beyond work, when they return home or how they get to work. We would require plans to segment homes and transport and ensure that risky people and safe people are kept secure and isolated from everyone else. There will be many homes where such segmentation is not possible, and then we may have to pull into service for the period of this emergency the private accommodation and transport services currently lying idle in the tourism sector.

This plan is about three main things. First and foremost, it is about public health and keeping people safe post-lockdown. Second, it is about exiting the full lockdown, bringing back activity and stopping the spread of severe risks to society. Third, it is about breathing hope and killing despair. It is a plan that engages all and gives all a sense that they are doing something positive about their lives and circumstances.

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Challenges in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

PINARAYI VIJAYAN

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a rethinking of the contours of state intervention, especially in social sectors like health. The argument for rolling back the state has become questionable even among mainstream commentators.

Kerala's experience shows how public investment in healthcare and a participatory mode of governance with empowered local governments can help in pandemic mitigation. A truly federal set-up with shared responsibilities between the centre and states is better suited to deal with situations like the present one rather than a centralised system.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a great divide in history. The global capitalist system has been thoroughly shaken by the pandemic. This is not the first time in its history that capitalism has faced such a crisis. The Great Depression of the 1930s was a classic demonstration of the systemic crisis-proneness of capitalism and the consequences of the domination of speculative finance capital over production. To save the capitalist system from collapse, the Keynesian concept of comprehensive socialisation of investment was sought to be undertaken in the developed world. Nation states intervened with massive public investment, raised levels of employment and evaded the recession. After World War II, Keynesian demand management and the provision of a host of welfare measures—by the state—were central to the economic policies in the developed world. Government spending in the social sectors rose and taxation became more progressive. Such a conjuncture was highly favourable to growth and employment generation. This period was also marked by a shift in the balance of class forces in favour of the working class, which wrested major concessions from the ruling class by making use of their stronger bargaining position.

In India, however, the post-war challenges as a newly independent nation were more fundamental. It needed, at the least, land reform, major public investments in infrastructure, education and health as well as the institution of a comprehensive social security system. Unfortunately, the political nature of ruling classes in India ensured that these measures were stymied. This is where states like Kerala stood apart and succeeded. Land reforms in Kerala weakened upper-caste landlordism in a way no other state could. The state also

invested in its people by instituting a universal schooling system and a comprehensive public health system. It also set up a social security net for the poor, including providing social security pensions for informal workers.

Kerala's successes in human development became well known to the world by the 1970s itself. Kerala held a lesson for the rest of India with regard to the centrality of land reform and the role of the state in improving public facilities. However, the reactionary ideology of neo-liberalism, that emerged globally in the 1970s, gradually took India onto a different policy trajectory. This ideology first emerged in countries like United Kingdom and the United States and was later concretised into the liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation agenda in many countries. We know that these policies had disastrous impacts on people's livelihoods and exposed global capitalism to new forms of crisis as in 2008.

India began a partial liberalisation of the economy in the 1980s, but it was after 1991 that it fully embraced the new strategy. After 1991, state intervention in the economy was challenged. Liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation became official policies. The role of the public sector was scaled down from its commanding heights. Fiscal responsibility legislations and tax concessions for the rich adversely affected the ability of governments to intervene and invest in sectors like health and education. As a result, inequalities and exclusions in sectors like health and education grew rapidly. The poor were pushed out of an already debilitated public health system.¹ Their healthcare costs rose. Infectious diseases like malaria, which were eradicated earlier, reappeared.

In other words, through the 1990s till now, India's public health system was already crumbling due to a lack of public investment and political commitment to positive social change. As a result, when the pandemic hit India, its health system as a whole was vulnerable and unable to meet the new challenge.

In contrast, we in Kerala were instilling new vigour into our public health

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system. Over the last four years, we were able to transform our public health system through our health mission called *Aardram*. As part of the mission, we built new public health infrastructure, increased the number of doctors, nurses and care staff, deepened community management and improved hygiene and sanitation. Our experience is that this strategy has been hugely successful. We saw it first when Kerala warded off the Nipah virus outbreak of 2018. The moderate success, as yet, we have achieved in confronting COVID-19 is another proof of the strategy's success.

Importance of Local Governments

In times of pandemics like COVID-19, the relationship between the state and the people needs to be strong, trustworthy and organic. This will not be possible in a centralised system of governance, wherein even minor decisions are taken at the highest tier of the government, which is the farthest from the people. Our economist friends will tell us that such a policy will be violative of the principle of subsidiarity, which states that the tier closest to the people can discharge certain functions more effectively. In our view, when you are faced with a contagious disease that could quickly attain the stage of community spread, the best strategy to contain it is a participatory mode of governance. The prime role in this is to be discharged by the local governments with community participation.

Historically, Kerala has had a very strong system of decentralised governance. The attempts to build and strengthen the grass-roots level democracy in the state precede the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. Legislative efforts in this regard started as early as 1957 when the state elected its first communist government led by E M S Namboodiripad. However, the attempts to decentralise governance were not very successful at that time, as it met with stiff resistance from the dominant sections of the society. Further, these policies could not be taken to their logical conclusion because the left parties were in and out of office. Every right-wing government that would follow a left government would significantly dilute and undo the gains made

by the previous government. As a result, whenever a left government comes to power in Kerala, its initial task is to repair the damages and rebuild the institutions. This has been a long-standing developmental problem in the state. Yet, after the constitutional amendments, Kerala made pioneering strides in the decentralised form of governance, including implementation of the peoples' plan programme. As a result, there is considerable community participation in the planning process, which has enriched the process of decentralisation of power.

It is this strong system of participatory governance that has helped Kerala in the containment measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us look at just one example. The state could effectively implement home quarantine (we prefer to call it home observation). Here, the elected members of the local governments and officials of line departments acted not merely as enforcers, but also as caregivers. Strong messages about giving due care to people in home quarantine, and not ostracising or stigmatising them, could be passed on effectively to the public at large under the leadership of local governments. A top-down model would have failed here.

Besides the leading role assigned to local governance institutions, Kerala could also utilise the services of community volunteers. These volunteers were a recent addition to the state's participatory system of managing natural calamities. The Community Volunteer Corps formed in 2020 now has a strength of approximately 3,37,000 individuals who are physically and mentally fit to handle emergency situations. The aim is to have one volunteer per 100 population. This will work out to having a 3,43,000 strong community of volunteers. The state government is in the process of imparting professional training to these volunteers to equip them to handle natural calamities and the pandemic.

The point to be emphasised is the following. A state or a central government can give broad directions and guidelines, but people's participation under the leadership of empowered local governments seems to be the most effective strategy to contain the spread of the

pandemic. At the same time, a strong public sector in health and education is necessary for this decentralised model to work well. Only when all these three pillars are strong enough will the participatory strategy of tackling the pandemic be successful. This is the narrative which the Kerala experience places before the world at large.

New Challenges

The Kerala society and its government have received generous praise from many parts of the world. While we are happy that our narrative is getting acceptance, we do also recognise that this is not the time to rest on our laurels. We are constantly keeping a watch and receiving suggestions from all stakeholders. We are taking the process of consultations outside the usual scheme of governance by having a constant dialogue with persons who are settled abroad, leaders of industry and experts in the field of health and education.

Being an early starter in inclusive and universal school education, Kerala's human capital is spread across the globe. The remittances our diaspora send in have been a major catalyst for consumption expenditure and economic growth in Kerala. At present, many of our countrymen working abroad are facing an unprecedented crisis. Almost 9% of Kerala's population lives outside the state. The number is approximately 30 lakh. We fully recognise their desire to return to their homes. The Government of Kerala is committed to ensuring the welfare of persons who wish to return. However, circumstances have forced us to put in place certain regulatory mechanisms with the aim of containing the spread of the pandemic.

The state government has also demonstrated its commitment to assist "guest workers" from other states who have been working in Kerala in search of a livelihood. We support their emotional desire to go back to their home states and be with their families. Simultaneously, we are also taking steps to ensure jobs for those among them who want to stay back.

In the midst of the pandemic, the Government of Kerala also requested

the domain experts to assess the losses to the state's economy due to the pandemic. It has been estimated that the state's gross domestic product (GDP) will face a downslide of approximately ₹1 lakh crore. Its growth rate is estimated to face a precipitous fall from around 7% to less than 2%. The worst-case scenario projections estimate the economic growth falling in the negative territory (see KSPB 2020; GIFT 2020).

This implies that the own tax revenue of the state will suffer a major decline. Experts have estimated that it will be in the range of ₹25,000 crore to ₹30,000 crore. Yet, due to the pandemic-related obligations, the expenditure, especially in the social sector, will be above the budget estimates. Cutting expenditure to meet deficit targets will have a cataclysmic impact on the economy and society. A government committed to the Directive Principles of the Constitution cannot do this. Hence, Kerala and other states have been consistent in demanding that the mechanical limits to borrowing by the states will have to be relaxed. The state was among the first to demand raising of the borrowing limit of states from 3% to 5% of the gross state domestic product (GSDP). This is a time when fiscal conservatism should be discarded. Our economic growth is in peril.

As per the latest estimates released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), the growth rate of gross value added (GVA) at basic prices for 2019–20 was 3.9% as against 6.0% for 2018–19 (Government of India 2020). The growth of manufacturing sector fell to 0.03% during 2019–20 from 5.7% during 2018–19. The growth rate of the employment-intensive construction sector also fell from 6.1% to 1.3% between 2018–19 and 2019–20. These slowdown trends were evident even before the lockdown induced a halt to all the economic activities.

In the above circumstance, reviving growth in the economy has to be prime consideration. For this, fiscal orthodoxy has to give way to an expansionary fiscal programme. Public borrowing at this time to spend and protect the livelihoods of people and to build new infrastructure will energise the economy and

expand employment. We are of the considered opinion that public spending in social sectors and generating demand in the economy through capital works have to be taken up by tapping resources in the market. We will have to focus on growth and gradually grow out of the debt. The protagonists of fiscal orthodoxy across the world seem to have realised this, at least temporarily.

Our country should not remain hesitant as we have a very large section (almost 90%) of the labour force in the informal sector with little or no social security. Till the economy recovers, incomes need to be put in their hands so that demand deficiency does not hold back economic growth. Equal care needs to be given to address supply-side bottlenecks. It is the time to work together and not in compartments. The states and local governments are equal partners with the centre in the structure of cooperative federalism. There cannot be asymmetric relations, which will result in fiscally disempowering the tiers of the government closer to the people.

In Conclusion

The outbreak of COVID-19 could not have come at a more inappropriate time. The national economy had already started showing palpable indicators of an economic slowdown. In fact, the first signs were evident as early as 2008. Particularly after 2011–12, the investment rate and the savings rate in the economy showed a downward slide. Employment fell. Official data for 2017–18 showed that our unemployment rates were the highest in the last 45 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged on top of the already brewing crisis and it has brought the economy to a grinding halt. Government revenues have dried up while spending obligations have gone up. We should not hesitate to borrow and spend in the immediate run to revive the economy. In the medium run, we should rethink our economic priorities and redefine the role of the state so that it will be empowered to effectively intervene in social sectors like health and education. Fashionable phrases such as “minimum government, maximum governance” should have no place.

The experience of the pandemic should act as a game changer in assessing the role of the state vis-à-vis the market. Public sector intervention in social and economic sectors cannot be treated as an avoidable evil. Borrowing by the state cannot always be a vice. Growth that is induced through borrowing can have positive multiplier effects. Empowered states and local governments should be equal partners with the centre in a cooperative federal set-up. Only they, together, can encourage investment and provide social security. This needs to be our way ahead.

NOTE

- 1 There are empirical evidences of growing inequalities in income and wealth (Piketty 2017; Chancel and Piketty 2017). In the Indian context, researchers have found that the degree of health inequalities escalate when the rising average income levels of the population are accompanied by rising income inequalities (Joe et al 2008). The same is the case of education unless there is intervention by the state.

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Parliaments in the Time of the Pandemic

MAANSI VERMA

Democratic accountability demands that the executive decisions and actions during the pandemic need to be subjected to legislative scrutiny. However, this process is absent as the Parliament is adjourned and even the parliamentary committees are not functioning. Taking a cue from the parliaments worldwide that are functional during the pandemic, modalities to ensure the functioning of parliamentary institutions need to be devised.

On 23 March 2020, the budget session of Parliament, scheduled to run till 2 April 2020, was cut short and adjourned *sine die* (indefinitely) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The budget session, which had started on 31 January 2020, one day after the World Health Organization declared this outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, witnessed 23 sittings during which many members of Parliament (MPs) raised questions related to the novel coronavirus and statements were made by ministers on the same. A question search on the Lok Sabha website throws up 44 results, with one of the earliest questions asked on 7 February on the screening of coronavirus cases to which the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare provided a detailed response on steps taken (Lok Sabha 2020a). Some other questions in the Lok Sabha pertained to the impact of the coronavirus on trade directed to Ministry of Finance (Lok Sabha 2020b) and discrimination faced by students from north-eastern parts of the country directed to the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (Lok Sabha 2020c).

Another 40 questions were raised in the Rajya Sabha, with the earliest on 11 February on measures to prevent the spread of the disease (Rajya Sabha 2020a). The Ministry of Labour and Employment was also questioned about the impact of the coronavirus on employment, and the ministry admitted to not having any data on retrenchments caused due to the same (Rajya Sabha 2020b). During this 23-day short budget session, the minister of health and family welfare made two statements each on the floor of both the houses apprising members of the steps taken, and two statements were made by the minister of external affairs about Indians stranded in other countries.¹ All these questions and concerns raised by the MPs, along with statements made and responses given by ministers, are the

outcome of the constitutional scheme of our parliamentary democracy.

Lack of Institutional Checks

Our Constitution envisages three primary roles for our Parliament—lawmaking, representation and accountability. The Constitution devolves the lawmaking power to Parliament by providing for all those subjects on which Parliament has jurisdiction to make laws,² the representative nature of Parliament is evident from the composition of both houses³ and the accountability function of the Parliament is laid down in Article 75(3) of the Constitution, which states that “The Council of Ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of People.” Thus, Parliament is a legislative body designed to keep the executive under check on behalf of the people it represents, and MPs use the instruments of questions and debates to perform their role. But, if Parliament is not in session when the entire nation is in the grip of a pandemic, then it creates an additional crisis of representation and accountability.

This is because the pandemic has expanded the scope of government control on every aspect of life with likely longer-term ramifications. On the one hand, as has been argued, governments in different parts of the world are seeing the crisis as an opportunity to impose harsh laws and restrictions, which are also being received positively by people reeling under fear of death, even if they come at the cost of loss of freedoms (Applebaum 2020). And, on the other hand, a “solutionist” tendency has pervaded public administration where technology, bordering on surveillance, is being pushed as an appropriate response to every crisis, which comes at the cost of asking tough questions to those wielding power (Morozov 2020). In the absence of robust institutions to keep governments under check, democratic principles may be under threat.

As per a tracker set up by PRS Legislative Research, as many as 732 notifications have been issued by the central government since the spread of the virus came to light. These range from international travel restrictions to the postponement of board exams to prohibition on the export of masks, ventilators and advisories

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to employers to refrain from terminating from employment or deduction of wages.⁴ Some of these notifications have invited criticism—the voluntary deduction of one day's salary of government staff to Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) which is mandatory in effect (Mohanty 2020); the automatic extension of environment clearance to all projects and the issuing of draft Environment Impact Assessment notification for public consultation, which environmentalists have decried (Nandi 2020); the mandatory use of Aarogya Setu app on which many privacy concerns have been raised (Clarence 2020).

Two months into the lockdown, the Supreme Court has also received scathing condemnation for its abdication of duty with respect to monitoring government's inadequate intervention in providing relief to migrant workers and has been urged to shed its helplessness and exercise its power under Article 142 to do complete justice (*Indian Express* 2020). Right to information activists have expressed concern on the dismal functionality of information commissions in various states though the Central Information Commission began hearings through videoconferencing and audio means from 15 April itself as citizens' right to information requires even greater protection during the times of crisis (Mishra 2020). The non-functionality of any institution that keeps the executive under check in these times is problematic, but even more concerning is the non-availability of the most fundamental platform for raising concerns on excesses or failures of the government—Parliament.

Representation and Accountability

At the outset, it must be noted that it is disconcerting that the Indian Parliament itself has no control over when a session may be called and when it is adjourned. Though the President summons and prorogues a session, they do so on the aid and advice of the council of ministers.⁵ Having assumed the power to decide the dates of a session to itself, the executive is able to control the agenda in various manners. For instance, Parliament sessions have been postponed to avoid providing a platform to the opposition ahead of a

crucial state election; the intersession period is often used to bring ordinances that the government may otherwise find difficult to push through in Parliament (Verma and Prasad 2018). This is contrary to the practice in some other countries like the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada, and South Africa where calendars with sitting dates are announced at the beginning of the year itself (Khullar 2017). Additionally, in the UK, MPs approve recess through a vote (*BBC* 2019b), and last year, the supreme court of UK struck down the prorogation of Parliament by the Queen, with several days of sittings left, as it prevented "Parliament from being able to do its job" (*BBC* 2019a).

In contrast to India's Parliament with no set calendar, several parliaments across the world are committed to meet on set dates through the year, and therefore, it was not surprising to see many parliamentary institutions quickly adapting to the changed circumstances. Since sitting in close proximity with each other was no longer feasible, many parliaments switched to virtual or hybrid sessions. In the UK, hybrid sessions were organised as per which up to 50 members could be physically present in the chamber and 120 could be present over videoconference, and members could raise departmental questions, Prime Minister questions, legislative business and even remote voting could be conducted through the same (UK Parliament 2020d). Canada also organised a virtual parliament where MPs joined over a Zoom call, permitting MPs to ask questions to the government (Tumilty 2020). The Bureau of European Parliament has agreed to temporary changes to its rules of procedure to permit virtual deliberations and voting by MPs and committee members (Library of Congress 2020). In Chile, the constitution was amended to permit the senate to hold sessions in a mixed-system of face-to-face and virtual participation, allowing for remote voting as well (Republic of Chile Senate 2020).

Spain, one of the worst affected countries by the pandemic, also ensured that legislative work does not stop, as despite a complete lockdown, MPs continued to deliberate and vote on legislative proposals (Alsina and Gambrell 2020). Closer home, Maldives parliament or People's

Majlis is using Microsoft Teams videoconferencing technology to hold virtual parliament sessions. The Speaker of Maldives Parliament, Mohamed Nasheed, sums up the need to move towards virtual sessions thus, "Parliaments worldwide cannot just stop representing their people during this crisis. The institutions of democracy must continue to function" (*Frontier Enterprise* 2020). As per some reports, the Indian government is now considering measures like holding the sessions in Central Hall, which will provide more space to MPs, alternate sittings between the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, remote attendance, and even a UK style hybrid model, but even then, the session may only be convened by the end of August (Sharma 2020). There seems to be no urgency as the Constitution permits a six-month hiatus between the end of one session and start of another.⁶ Parliament will continue to be prevented from doing its job.

Parliamentary Committees

But, what has been doubly disappointing for India is the fact that the parliamentary committees that continue to function even when Parliament is not in session have also been rendered dysfunctional. Several MPs have requested the presiding officers of both houses to allow committee meetings to be conducted virtually, arguing that even the Prime Minister and other ministers are holding meetings virtually (Prabhu and Banerjee 2020). It has been reported that such a move has been resisted by the Parliament secretariat as committee meetings are supposed to be confidential and virtual meetings can be hacked into (Varma and Anuja 2020). Though a valid concern, it is not entirely clear that when the Prime Minister and other government officials have already started using an online meeting portal designed by NIC (National Informatics Centre), why can the same not be used for committee meetings as well? (Chatterji 2020a). Chakshu Roy, head of legislative and civic engagement at PRS Legislative Research, while highlighting that Rules of Procedure provide enough discretion to presiding officers to permit virtual meetings, argued that

The institution of Parliament has to continuously evolve to not only keep a check on the

increasing canvas of government functioning, but to also stay relevant as a governance institution. (Yamunan 2020)

There were indications that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs would meet on 3 June 2020 and become the first department-related Standing Committee to meet since the lockdown was first imposed (Chatterji 2020b). The union home secretary had to appear before the committee and brief the members on the ministry's handling of the crisis and respond to questions by the members. Given the slew of notifications and guidelines that the Ministry of Home Affairs issued on containment and movement of people throughout the duration of the lockdown, this review by the committee should have happened much sooner. But the meeting had to be postponed as several MPs expressed the inability to travel, and a request for a virtual meeting was denied by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat (Manoj and Mathew 2020). In the UK, just before parliament went into recess, MPs raised several questions to the Prime Minister on the handling of the coronavirus, including one on "publishing the scientific advice that the decisions [lockdown decisions] were based on" (UK Parliament 2020b). But Indian people, represented through their MPs, are at a disadvantage in raising such questions on the floor of Parliament or in committee meetings.

In UK again, a joint select committee on human rights launched an inquiry into the human rights implications of the government's response to COVID-19 and specifically looked at the surveillance and breach of privacy concerns arising out of their contact-tracing application, the report of which was also made public (UK Parliament 2020a). Following this, the committee also drafted a bill on the COVID-19 contact tracing application, asking the government to bring it to parliament (UK Parliament 2020c). In India, similar concerns have also been raised with respect to the Aarogya Setu application and demands have been made for it to be rooted in a law, which abides by the standards for privacy laid down by the Supreme Court (Prasad 2020). But, it is only a matter of speculation whether the government

would consider bringing a bill for the same anytime soon, especially when the Personal Data Protection Bill also remains pending before the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) which is unable to meet.

South African parliament recently held a joint meeting of its Committee on Social Development and Health and Social Services where the committees were briefed by non-governmental organisations as well as the Department of Social Development on the implementation of food security, psycho-social support and gender-based violence-related programmes in response to COVID-19 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2020). Despite a looming food security crisis in India, the standing committees in Indian Parliament have not had the opportunity yet of being briefed either by ministry officials or other stakeholders on the steps taken by the government to provide relief to people in distress. On 31 March 2020, barely seven days after the budget session was curtailed, the central government brought an ordinance that, among other things, provided for 100% tax exemption to donations made to PM CARES, which was established a few days before (*Economic Times* 2020). Had the budget session been allowed to run its ordinary course till 3 April, the government would have had to bring this as a bill in Parliament, which would have facilitated a debate on many issues concerning PM CARES which have been highlighted since then (Meghnad 2020).

In Conclusion

In 2011, following the 2G spectrum allocation controversy, the government of the day was pushed by the opposition to set up a JPC to look into the allegations, and Arun Jaitley, the leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha at that time, famously termed the upcoming budget session as the "session of accountability" (*Economic Times* 2011). Not just that session, every session and every sitting of Parliament is about accountability, though not in an adversarial manner but in a collaborative, cooperative manner, which advances the interests of the people whose voices the parliamentarians represent. Modern parliaments are described as institutions aiming towards the ideal of a "strong

Executive Government tempered and controlled by constant vigilance and representative criticism" (Kaul and Shakhder 2016: 10). Adjourned in the midst of a pandemic, India's Parliament currently is far from this ideal.

It is, however, possible to make incremental steps towards that ideal. As long as the fear of infection looms large, various activities all over the world will continue to go digital and virtual, and our Parliament and its committees cannot be an exception. The standing committees must be enabled to meet online at the earliest. As per the Lok Sabha website, the Standing Committee on Labour and Information Technology was scheduled to meet on 5 June and 10 June 2020, respectively. However, the Information Technology Committee meeting had to be postponed to 17 June 2020 as, ironically, no decision could be reached on holding the sitting through videoconferencing. For future meetings, instead of pushing the date ahead, arrangements must be put in place for those MPs who cannot travel to join the meeting virtually.

Additionally, those parts of committee meetings in which oral evidence is being tendered before the committee, whether by ministry officials or by external stakeholders, must be made public as is the practice in several other countries (*Live-mint* 2017). This is because, especially during a pandemic, transparency around the steps being taken by the government for the people, acts as an essential check against greater concentration and abuse of power (Transparency International 2020). Finally, now would be an appropriate time to experiment with a precedent for allowing MPs to demand special sessions of Parliament to deal with emergency concerns. Naresh Gujral, Rajya Sabha MP from Shiromani Akali Dal, had made a similar proposition in his private member's bill in which he provided that such a special session, which may be of 15 days' duration, should be convened to deliberate on a limited number of matters of urgent importance, which may be decided after deliberating not just with all political parties but by inviting suggestions from public as well.⁷ Despite several MPs supporting the bill, it was negated during the vote but the ideas

proposed in the bill are more relevant now than ever.

NOTES

- 1 On 7 February 2020 in Rajya Sabha followed by 10 February 2020 in Lok Sabha, the health minister made detailed statements on the steps taken by government to deal with spread of the coronavirus. Again on 5 March 2020, statements were made by the health minister in the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha. On 7 February, the minister of external affairs also made a statement explaining steps being taken by the government to bring back stranded Indians in other countries like China and Iran. On 12 March, the minister of external affairs gave a statement in the Lok Sabha on Indians stranded in Iran.
- 2 Article 246 read with Schedule VII of the Constitution of India.
- 3 Article 80 of the Constitution of India provides for composition of Council of States to comprise of 238 representatives of states and Article 81 provides for composition of House of People to comprise of 530 members chosen by direct election.
- 4 <https://prsindia.org/covid-19/notifications>,
- 5 Article 85 read with Article 74 of the Constitution of India.
- 6 Article 85 of the Constitution of India.
- 7 Rajya Sabha, "The Parliament (Enhancement of Productivity) Bill 2017," introduced on 24 March 2017, <http://164.100.47.4/BillsTexts/RSBillTexts/asintroduced/parliament-24317-E.pdf>.

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COVID-19 and Infectious Misinformation

ANIKET SULE

In these times of pandemic, we are witnessing the continued dissemination of pseudoscientific misinformation about the disease as well as dubious claims of alternative cure. In some instances, such claims appear to be getting official endorsements. Enabling people to identify unscientific claims and hoaxes, is the way forward to build rational immunity to halt the infectious spread of misinformation.

We are living in an unusual period. When was the last time that a disease infected millions of people in under six months and penetrated every county? When was the last time that the scientific community as well as governments appeared totally helpless? When was the last time that the majority of the world population was forced to stay indoors for days and weeks? Every one of these situations has a potential for a paradigm shift, shaking people's faith in governments, science, economy, world order, etc. In such moments of crisis of faith, the void created by the diminishing confidence in these systems is filled by other things like misinformation.

When COVID-19 started spreading around the world, it did not take much time for many to realise that this disease is unlike others. Swine flu, bird flu, and mad cow disease were thought to be deadly, but their spread remained limited. Thus, humanity had enough time on its hand to develop their treatment. But, this one spread like wild fire and exposed the deficiencies of medical services and governments the world over. Naturally, the blame game began.

Misinformation Factory

First set of whisper campaigns, that is, anonymous WhatsApp forwards, tried to convince people that this virus was purposely released by China, where the first infections appeared. Some initial messages tried arguing that this is a lab-made virus. But after the release of scientific evidence conclusively showing that the virus was a natural mutation, these messages changed their tone to say that China allowed to spread it globally on purpose or due to negligence or due to its obsession with secrecy. Then, there were accompanying forwards trying to expose how China is planning to take over the world economy using this virus as a weapon and the usual "ban Chinese

products" rhetoric. These were trying to paint a picture that other governments cannot be held responsible for stumbling in front of this disease because it is a planned conspiracy. But now, months have passed and the governments cannot escape the blame for failure of their medical systems and their strategies. Thus, these kind of WhatsApp forwards have now lost their currency.

Around the same time, the second set of misinformation messages started talking about occult methods. Astrologers and numerologists came forward to claim that they had predicted this pandemic before it started. Some of them had also predicted when the waning phase of COVID-19 will start. As expected, those dates have come and gone.

Then, some people spoke about chants and positive energies. People did not even spare symbolic gestures proposed by the Prime Minister. For each of those gestures, at least five different explanations were doing the rounds to articulate the so-called scientific rationale behind the proposed actions. All of these claimed that if these symbolic tasks were carried through, the virus will disappear then and there. Naturally, there were processions and public events of celebration after each of those tasks. As it happens with every new disease, some cow enthusiasts declared that COVID-19 can be either treated or prevented by cow urine, cow dung, or *panchagavya*. This fell out of favour by late March, when they realised that their unusual choice of drink is not helping and, in fact, was making some people sick. But, this hoax is now again gathering steam with the Gujarat government starting human trials of *panchagavya* on COVID-19 patients (Sanghavi 2020).

As there was no ready medicine or vaccine available, people turned towards home remedies. The next wave of misinformation started advocating using everything from tea, ginger, garlic, lemon to baking soda and nasal rinses using mustard oil. Many of these substances are used to provide relief from symptoms in the case of the common cold and cough, and hence, it is understandable that many people thought that these may also work in the case of COVID-19. But, what they fail to realise is

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the fact that, even in the case of common cold, the relief provided by these substances is temporary and just a relief from external symptoms. Since the cold is not really cured by these, the claim was flawed to begin with. As we have seen in the extreme example of the suggestion by the United States (us) President about injecting disinfectant inside people, even for a most outlandish suggestion such as this, there are some people who will mindlessly follow it through. Thus, our social influencers advocating some of these home remedies made matters worse.

Here, one must acknowledge a genuine confusion in the public understanding of the term “immunity.” In scientific terms, immunity is always against a specific disease, and the only way to acquire such immunity is either through vaccination or if one gets cured after getting infected. By either way, the body develops antibodies to prevent future infection. However, in common parlance, anything which contributes to better health is mistaken as “improving/boosting immunity.” As a result, many products, from herbal concoctions to sanitisers and handwashes and masks, claim immunity-boosting properties in their marketing campaigns.

Various authorities from company owners to local corporators and office-bearers of residents’ associations then fall prey to this false marketing and start distribution of these products to all, in the name of public service. We even heard the Prime Minister talking about “traditional immunity boosters” in one of his national addresses (*India Today* 2020). This may simply seem like an issue of linguistic nuance, but can lead to very serious consequences. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people take such “immunity-boosting substances” and then become overconfident that they are immune to the novel coronavirus. This mistaken belief leads to one lowering one’s guard and gives an opening for the virus to strike.

Another set of hoaxes created all sort of confusion about the nature of this virus and its spread. There were claims that the virus is spreading through meat and Chinese food. In the initial weeks, many were confident that the virus will not be able to spread in India due to heat and humidity. In the early part of May,

some newspapers carried stories that bats are spreading this virus and many hyperactive local bodies started pruning trees, which housed colonies of bats.

Unscientific Prescriptions

In the game of Chinese whispers, we start with a meaningful message, but just after a few retellings, it gets all garbled up. Similar is the case with COVID-19-related messaging. You start with something as simple as, “Concentrated bleach can be used to disinfect various common surfaces” and before you know it, somewhere in the country bleach solution is sprayed on hapless migrants. Nowadays, many cities and localities have started spraying disinfectant on the streets once every few days. Many housing societies and offices are following their example blindly and the equipment manufacturers are making a nice profit. However, no one stops to think what is the probability of someone touching the road surface and then immediately touching their nose or mouth or if most of the viral molecules on these surfaces are anyway deactivated within a few hours, what additional protection is being offered by spraying the streets once in a week?

If you look at the medicines and treatments being used around the world, again, there is significant confusion leading to misinformation. In March and April, authorities in the us made some positive noises regarding hydroxychloroquine (HCQ). After that, many countries and agencies started using HCQ on many patients without proper scientific validation. Some companies distributed HCQ tablets to medical workers with a lot of fanfare and publicity. But now, research suggests that there is no evidence of HCQ helping in COVID-19 treatment and, on the other hand, there are significant and potentially fatal side effects (Bosely 2020).

Lastly, there is the elephant in the room that needs to be acknowledged. Most of these misleading messages are being sent by anonymous persons. But the Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) ministry of the Government of India is consistently sending out claims about medicines without any scientific evidence. It has been obsessed with the homoeo-

pathic substance known as arsenicum album D30 (AA30). The ministry first issued a circular in early February that AA30 can cure the novel coronavirus; this was met with swift condemnation from the scientific community (Bhasin 2020). But after a few weeks’ silence, the AYUSH ministry again started putting out infographics claiming that AA30 can prevent COVID-19 by boosting immunity. As a result, now many local politicians are going door to door distributing packets of AA30. It is well-established in multiple studies that homoeopathic substances have success rates only as good as placebos and, hence, its status as medicine is disputed. Yet, the AYUSH ministry is steadfastly ignoring it and promoting these substances.¹ Various state governments have since followed AYUSH advisories without any application of mind and wasted time and effort in the distribution of substances with questionable medical value (Barnagarwala 2020; *Hindu* 2020; Rout 2020).

Task of Dispelling Myths

Several groups are fighting valiantly against this horde of misinformation. An initiative called Indian Scientists’ Response to COVID-19 (ISRC), has created a number of infographics on hoaxes, which were backed by more detailed analysis.² We, at ISRC, are collaborating with media houses to create videos on this topic. We are doing call-in sessions in Indian languages to answer questions from people regarding COVID-19. We also issued a strong public statement against claims regarding alternative medicines and COVID-19. There are several other groups and institutes that are doing similar work. But, the flood of misinformation is relentless. When we get a random forward, we carefully check all research to date to verify each and every claim from that forward; then we craft a response that accurately reflects the evidence seen in the research, and also translate this response to multiple languages to reach a large audience. This process takes anywhere between a week to 10 days. By the time we are ready with our output, that hoax would already be out of the market and five new hoaxes would have taken its pace.

Is it then worth fighting such rampant spread of misinformation? Many of my colleagues feel that few of us who keep talking about scientific temper are just going out of our way to sniff out such outrageous things. They feel things are not as bad as we portray. Are not most people smart enough to separate chalk from cheese? Unfortunately, the answer is not very encouraging. There is obviously one section in our society that has associated many of these hoaxes with ethnic pride and considers any attempt to correct misinformation as some Western conspiracy. These people are not going to change their views irrespective of the evidence presented to them. But, there is a larger second layer of society enveloping this first group that should be our focus. This group includes those people who will not create such misinformation, but they may believe it without questioning. They may not like to openly admit that they believe in any of the questionable advice they get through these messages, but their standard response of "What's the harm?" betrays their thinking. This group is largely invisible and hence underestimated, but that is the herd which emboldens the first group.

Misinformation spreads like an infection. It needs the community to jump from one host to another, and it does not reach pandemic proportions unless a critical mass is susceptible to it. There is no medicine to cure those who are severely infected by the misinformation bug. The only way to save society will be to build "herd immunity." Exactly like the viral infection, if a large section of society becomes immune to misinformation, most of it will die out without reaching you. What do we mean by "immune to misinformation"? If most people simply delete the questionable forwards they get, instead of forwarding them, that level of immunity will be enough to stop the spread. It still remains a task for science communicators to teach the masses how to spot questionable messages. And, that is where our focus should lie.

Our traditional strategy in science communication has been to tell people about the right kind of science, awe them with our fountain of information, and make them believe us by touting our

expertise. But, that strategy does not work anymore. People get any factoids they want with one Google search. The animations and videos you can show them are also available online. They no longer need experts for gathering information. We must realise this and stop talking about the same old scientific facts. Instead, we should communicate to them how the process of science works and what analysis is performed to arrive at that the judgment, whereby one result is labelled as scientific and another claim is unscientific. We should impart the skill of scientific thinking instead of just passing on scientific facts. As the Biblical saying goes, "if you give a man a fish, he will eat today, but teach a man to fish and he will eat forever." If you can teach a large number of people to fish, hopefully you will not have to fight misinformation the next time.

NOTES

- 1 Ministry of AYUSH circular is accessible here, <https://www.ayush.gov.in/docs/125.pdf>.
- 2 More information about ISRC can be found here, <http://indscicov.in/for-public/busting-hoaxes/>.

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Marginalised Migrants and Bihar as an Area of Origin

AVINASH KUMAR, MANISH KUMAR

Outmigration from Bihar in search of livelihood has been normalised over several decades, with Bihar being one of the topmost states of origin for the migrants. Unemployment rate in Bihar remains higher than the country average. Agriculture has become unviable over the years due to low yields, increasing landlessness and lack of financial support by the state. The return migration to the state in the wake of COVID-19 necessitates that the state generate farm and non-farm employment to address the crisis situation.

The working and living conditions in which migrant workers, who carry out back-breaking work to support the Indian economy in the cities, have hardly remained hidden from the public view. The plight of these workers became a subject of international attention after a nationwide lockdown was announced on 24 March 2020 at 8 pm (to be implemented after four hours). Not only did the state demonstrate total neglect of the marginalised migrants, but it also rendered them stateless, further exposing them to a world of infections, insecurity, and humiliations. With no state support and the loss of employment, the lockdown initiated a painful process for the migrants.

According to a recent survey conducted between 8 and 13 April 2020, 90% of migrant workers in various states did not get paid by their employers, 96% did not receive ration from the government, and 70% migrant workers did not get cooked food (*Hindu* 2020). Thousands of migrant workers across the country started to walk hundreds and thousands of kilometres to reach their native places. According to the World Bank, in just a few days of the lockdown, around 60,000 people had moved from urban centres to rural areas (*Economic Times* 2020). Soon, news reports started pouring in that several migrant labourers and their family members, including children, lost their lives on their way back, either out of hunger or road accidents (Rawal et al 2020).

Rural economies such as Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh are agricultural-based regions with the majority of the workforce dependent on related occupations. However, because the agricultural productivity of these regions has remained low, these states have failed to sustain the local population. Hence, the workforce from these regions chose to migrate to towns and cities in search of livelihoods. One of the other

main reasons for migration has been the problem of landlessness.

Outmigration from Bihar in search of livelihood has been normalised over several decades. But amidst the COVID-19 crisis, when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Nitish Kumar expressed its inability to bring back the migrants stranded across the country despite the decision of the centre to ease the lockdown to facilitate the interstate movement, many expressed their anger on social media (*Financial Express* 2020). It was only much later that these migrant workers could go back to their native states in Shramik special trains (Dutta 2020). Surprisingly, it was the migrant workers who had to foot the bill by paying the increased ticket price for their journey back home (Pandey 2020).

Given the plight of migrant workers amidst the COVID-19 crisis, we have attempted to understand why Bihar, despite registering a higher growth trajectory in the last 15 years, has continued to remain one of the topmost areas of origin of migrant workers. We also analyse whether the much-celebrated growth story of the NDA government in Bihar also includes measures to address the causes of outmigration from the state.

Migration Trends

The history of migration from Bihar dates back to the colonial period when the British used to send workers from this region to other colonies. However, migration continued from the state even in independent India. It was in response to the increased demand of labour due to the green revolution in the north-western part of the country in the early 1970s. Later in the 1980s and 1990s, migrants moved towards cities on the western coast and the southern part of the country from Bihar. This soon became a widespread phenomenon, cutting across the hierarchy of caste and class. The occupations in which they got involved in the big cities, like those of construction workers, security guards, rickshaw pullers, etc, remained highly caste and class dependent. Over the years, it became an accepted fact that remittance played a critical role to support livelihood in the state (Chanda 2011).¹

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The Census 2011 is the latest official data on migration in the country. However, the *Economic Survey of India 2016–17* had reported that there were 60 million interstate migrants in the country. Another study suggests that the short-term migrants, who work in the informal economy of India, are around 60–65 million (Srivastava 2020). In the case of Bihar, a study finds that almost half of the households in Bihar have at least one migrant person (*Times of India* 2020).

According to the Census 2011, there are approximately 55 million interstate migrants in the country, that is, people whose state of residence is different from the state of enumeration. The top five destinations include Maharashtra, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Haryana. Together, these states attract almost half of the interstate migrants. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh are among the top five origin states for interstate migrants (Table 1). The top five origin states account for 30 million interstate migrants, that is, 55% of the total.

According to the Census 2011, 7.5 million migrants reported Bihar as an origin state. The maximum number of migrants cited “search for work/employment” as their reason for migration, followed by “moved with household.” Among the preferred destinations for migrants,

Table 1: Top Destinations and Origin of Migrants in India, 2011

Top Destinations	Migrants (million)	Top Origins	Migrants (million)
Maharashtra	9.1 (17)	Uttar Pradesh	12.3 (23)
Delhi	6.3 (12)	Bihar	7.5 (14)
Uttar Pradesh	4.1 (7)	Rajasthan	3.8 (7)
Gujarat	3.9 (7)	Maharashtra	3.1 (6)
Haryana	3.6 (7)	Madhya Pradesh	3.0 (5)

Figures in parentheses represent the share (%) of total interstate migrants in India.
Source: Census of India, 2011.

Table 2: Top Destinations of Migrants from Bihar, 2011

Destination	Persons	Share in Total Migration from Bihar (%)
Jharkhand	13,36,048	18
Delhi	11,06,629	15
West Bengal	11,03,757	15
Uttar Pradesh	10,72,739	14
Maharashtra	5,68,667	8
Haryana	3,90,937	5
Gujarat	3,61,010	5
Punjab	3,52,537	5
Assam	1,47,742	2
Chhattisgarh	1,43,216	2

Source: Census of India, 2011.

Jharkhand is at the top with 18%, followed by Delhi with 15% (Table 2). However, the reasons for migration to different states are quite different.

Since Jharkhand and the most substantial part of Uttar Pradesh share the same cultural background with Bihar, marriage is one of the most important reasons for migration to these two states. Also, since Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar in 2000, it has also remained a significant employer of workers from Bihar as it retained the maximum number of industries. The census also reports that migrants from Bihar prefer Delhi the most for their work/employment. Delhi is also a preferred destination for education (Table 3). Out of the total migrants who have left Bihar citing work/employment as a reason, 18% reached Delhi, 13% Jharkhand, 12% West Bengal, 12% Maharashtra and 7% Gujarat. These five states also see the same trend in the category of “moved with household” as a reason for migration.

The National Sample Survey (NSS), 2010 had recorded 4.7 million migrants from Bihar in 2007–08. So, it indicates that in the next four years (until 2011) while the population of Bihar increased by 38%, the migration from the state grew by 59.6%. The higher growth rate of migration than the population growth reflects the shrinking work opportunities or work environment in the state as one of the possible reasons.

Reasons for Outmigration

The extent of employment generation at the origin has a direct influence on migration.² Lack of employment opportunities

has the potential to push working mass outside the state in search of income sources. Bihar is a landlocked state and traditionally it has been an agriculture-dominated economy. However, the state in the last one and a half decade has not witnessed any expansion in the agricultural sector. The area under major crops has almost remained stagnant and there is hardly any significant change in the yield rate. The yield rate of paddy in Bihar is 28 quintals per hectare, whereas the median value for the country is 40 quintals per hectare. Similarly, the yield rate of wheat in Bihar is 27 quintals per hectare and the median value for the country is 31 quintals per hectare (GOI 2019). The fact that the yield rates of major crops in Bihar are well below the national average, clearly indicates that the possibility of agricultural expansion exists, but the state government has hardly taken steps in that direction.

Thus, due to the low yield rates combined with the risk of frequent flood, agriculture over the years has become a less preferred employment sector of the rural households in Bihar. According to NSS 2014, in 2012–13 more than 50% (that is, 7.1 million) of the total rural households in the state were agricultural households. But according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017–18, only 35% (out of 17.9 million rural households) were self-employed in agriculture and 10% were casual agricultural labour. The figure of agricultural households of 2012–13 includes all those who were self-employed in agriculture and the households earning more than ₹3,000 from agriculture in a year. The comparison

Table 3: Top Five Destinations of Bihar’s Migrants for Different Reasons, 2011

Work / Employment	Business	Education	Marriage	Moved after Birth	Moved with Household	Others
Delhi (18)	West Bengal (31)	Delhi (21)	Uttar Pradesh (31)	West Bengal (21)	Delhi (20)	West Bengal (21)
Jharkhand (13)	Assam (18)	Uttar Pradesh (15)	Jharkhand (18)	Jharkhand (16)	Jharkhand (20)	Jharkhand (16)
West Bengal (12)	Odisha (10)	Jharkhand (13)	West Bengal (10)	Delhi (15)	West Bengal (20)	Delhi (15)
Maharashtra (12)	Jharkhand (10)	Maharashtra (10)	Delhi (10)	Maharashtra (13)	Maharashtra (20)	Maharashtra (13)
Gujarat (7)	Gujarat (5)	Karnataka (7)	Maharashtra (5)	Punjab (1)	Gujarat (20)	Punjab (1)
Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total
2.27 million [30]	0.15 million [2]	0.12 million [2]	1.82 million [24]	0.17 million [2]	1.98 million [27]	0.95 million [13]

Figures in parentheses represent the share (%) of total interstate migrants from Bihar to a particular destination for a particular reason. Figures in square brackets represent the total share (%) of migrants from Bihar moving for a particular reason.
Source: Census of India, 2011.

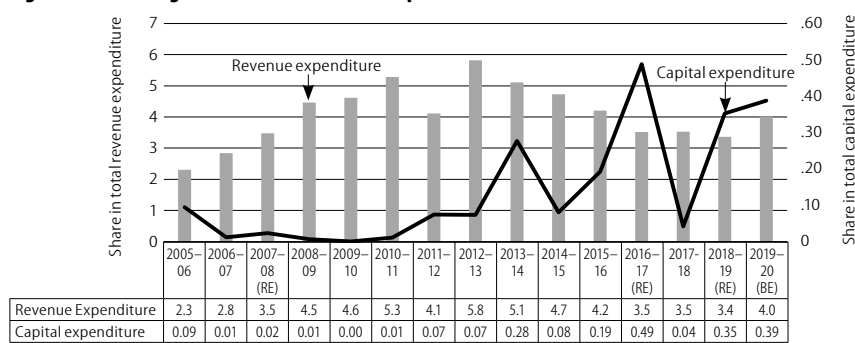
of 2012–13 and 2017–18 data proves that even with a broad definition of agriculture-dependent households in the later period, there is a decline from 50.5% to 45%.

The fall in the share of agricultural households in rural Bihar is also because of increasing landlessness in the state. In 2003–04, 38.8% of the total households in the state had no agricultural land (Rawal 2008). To address the situation of landlessness, the NDA government in the state had constituted the Bandyopadhyay Commission in 2005. The commission submitted its report in 2008. However, under the pressure of lobbies of big landlords, the report was not implemented. The government had explicitly assured the big landowners of the protection of their interests at all costs (Kumar 2012). In fact, landowners, cutting across the party and caste lines, including the ruling parties, led a campaign that land reform of any kind would “lead Bihar towards a civil war” (Kumar 2012).

On the one hand, increasing landlessness in Bihar pushed a large section of the population away from agriculture, and on the other hand, by losing the priority in the state’s finance, agriculture became unviable. By looking at the state’s budget it appears that although agriculture got priority in the first five years (2005–06 to 2010–11) of the NDA government, later on, it lost its priority in the policy framework. The share of agriculture in the total revenue expenditure was 2.3% in 2005–06 that gradually increased to 5.3% in 2010–11. Afterwards, the proportion declined until 2018–19. The budget estimate for agriculture in 2019–20 is slightly more than the last year. The share of agriculture in the total capital expenditure remained quite negligible in the first eight years in the reference period from 2005–06 to 2019–20. A few spikes that are visible in Figure 1 either coincide with election years or with the post-flood years. The physical outcome, if any, from any such improvement in the capital expenditure on agriculture requires some more time to become visible.

Considering the limited growth of agriculture, as explained above, one would then expect that the state government would necessarily strengthen its non-agricultural segment in order to employ

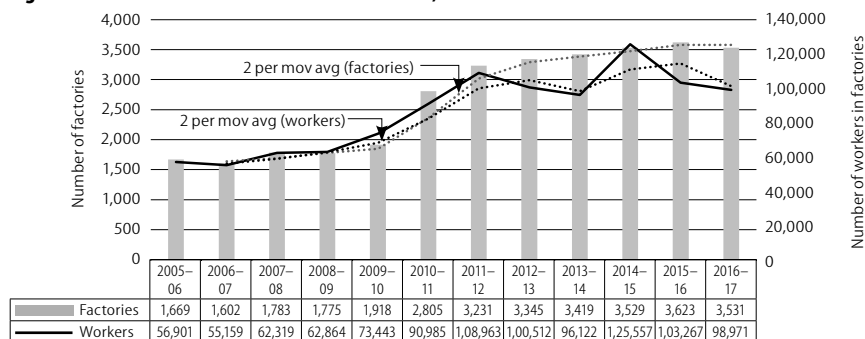
Figure 1: Share of Agriculture in Bihar's State Expenditure



RE is Revised Estimates, BE is Budget Estimates.

Source: Data from *Handbook of Statistics on State Government Finances*, Reserve Bank of India.

Figure 2: Number of Factories and Workers in Bihar, 2005–06 to 2016–17



Source: *Handbook of Statistics on Indian States*, Reserve Bank of India.

the displaced workforce from the farm sector. However, the performance of Bihar in this area is no different than the farm sector. The unemployment rate of Bihar has gradually increased in the period under consideration. It is also important to note that urban unemployment has always been greater than the rural unemployment (Table 4). In 2017–18, the country as a whole has witnessed a massive rise in unemployment, and so has Bihar. However, what is extremely worrying is that the unemployment rate in Bihar (7.2%) was higher than the average for the country (6.1%), according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2019.

There are three visible trends in the state concerning the number of factories (Figure 2).

Table 4: Unemployment Rate in Bihar (%)

	2004–05	2009–10	2011–12	2017–18
Rural				
Male	1.8	2.1	2.7	7.2
Female	0.2	1.3	8.2	2.3
Overall	1.5	2	3.2	7.0
Urban				
Male	6.7	6.3	4.5	9.2
Female	4.1	16	16.5	6.2
Overall	6.4	7.3	5.6	9.0

Source: *Handbook of Statistics on Indian States*, Reserve Bank of India and Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2019.

Between 2005–06 and 2009–10, there is no significant growth in the number of factories, but suddenly, this number rises in 2010–11 and 2011–12 to finally become stagnant after that. The drop in the urban unemployment rate in 2011–12 is also because of the rise in the number of factories in the state. The number of workers in the factories also increased proportionally between 2005–06 and 2011–12, and then declined. This trend reflects that even when the number of factories increased, it hardly made any significant impact on employment generation in the state. In the period between 2011–12 and 2016–17, the number of workers per factory declined from 34 to 28. A labour surplus state such as Bihar requires those sectors that can primarily address the employment crisis. Merely having more number of factories without adequate employment generation thus failed to absorb those leaving the farm sector, forcing them to migrate to other states.

Conclusions

Thus, although the continued outmigration from Bihar is the direct result of the enormously unbalanced human

development in the country, the NDA government in the state has hardly made attempts to address the economic and political reasons underlying this sad situation. It is clear from the arguments made above that the prime reason for such heavy outflow from Bihar is the absence of employment opportunities, both in the farm and the non-farm sectors. However, amidst the COVID-19 crisis, those who are hit the most belong to the poor and socially backward vulnerable households. The state has not only abdicated its responsibility towards providing employment opportunities to its citizens but also turned a blind eye towards them in this time of crisis.

All households that are facing reverse migration in Bihar, need immediate opportunities to earn cash. The state needs to create opportunities of work for them, expand the scale of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act worksites, and also consider initiatives like cash transfers for at least six months. It needs to provide dignity to its labour force. This certainly also would require the support of the

central government that goes beyond the mere rhetoric of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

NOTES

- 1 Remittances in Bihar in 2007-08 accounted for approximately 5.5% of the gross domestic product. The only state with a higher figure for remittances than Bihar is Kerala, which receives large remittances from migrant workers in West Asia.
- 2 In some cases, the objective to achieve upward mobility is also considered as one of the reasons for migration.

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Economic Implication of a Novel Disease Outbreak

Understanding Its Genesis

UNMILAN KALITA, ARUP KUMAR HAZARIKA, RAJIV KUMAR BORA, SUBHASH KHANNA, TAPASH KUMAR BARMAN

Novel disease outbreaks have a history of ravaging the regional economies. The world economy has taken a massive hit due to COVID-19 and is expected to go into a recession by the next quarter. As such, it has become highly imperative to invest in total epidemic preparedness involving health and non-health interventions, research and development as well as capacity building at all levels.

Over 200 years ago, Alexander von Humboldt, an influential 18th-century scientist, once explained the fundamental idea of nature stating that the world is a single-interconnected organism. A tiny variation in its ordinary workings bears the possibility of causing large ripples in other parts of this one whole organism. With over 7,00,000 affected people, more than 50,000 deaths and a looming recession, the 2019–20 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak is nothing but a harsh reminder of the supremacy of nature and the fallibility of contemporary economic thought.

The world has seen significant progress in healthcare services and economic preparedness since the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, which infected approximately 500 million worldwide, a quarter of the global population, of which about 50–100 million people lost their lives. This was followed by the Asian flu (H2N2) pandemic of 1957–58, the 1968 Hong Kong flu (H3N2), 1977 Russian flu and the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. While most of these novel outbreaks have been meticulously fought and successfully contained within spatial and temporal boundaries, the ripples created in the economic continuum have been substantial, with major implications in the form of sudden loss of intangible human capital (Cohen 2002), recessionary tendencies (Garrett 2007) and deficit spending pressure on low- and middle-income economies (Abegunde et al 2007). Much akin to these previous epidemics, current global evidence forecasts significant economic impacts *ex post* the current COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, we begin with a review of the economic cost of a novel disease outbreak followed by a note on the current ventilator crisis, interventions to manage the pandemic and the conclusion.

Economic Cost of a Disease

Novel outbreaks bring with them a plethora of economic costs. Among the macroeconomic ones, direct costs such as provision of healthcare services, productivity costs due to loss of human capital and productive time, and societal costs such as mass hysteria, are noteworthy. Other *ex post facto* costs include losses to the agricultural sector, tourism and travel, trade and retail industries, demographic impacts and environmental losses (Smith et al 2019). Since most of the novel outbreaks are zoonotic, agriculture and allied activities suffer great losses. For instance, after the 2000 Rift Valley fever virus outbreak, West Asian nations banned imports of meat from most African nations, leading to a 75% loss in meat exports amounting to \$300 million. Similarly, the Malaysian government lost almost \$300 million in exports after the 1998 Nipah virus outbreak. Besides, the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic cost the South East Asian tourism industry approximately \$4 billion, while the H1N1 influenza cost the Mexican tourism industry \$2.8 billion.

Trade and retail services also face dire circumstances, with epidemics taking a toll on national gross domestic products (GDPs). The HIV/AIDS pandemic has cost the world economy more than half a trillion dollars, with \$562.6 billion being expended on treatment and prevention between 2000 and 2015. African economies realised severely declining gross national product rates during the Ebola outbreak, while developed Asian economies such as Hong Kong lost 2.6% of its GDP to SARS. Besides, environmental impacts pertain to loss of non-market goods as well as destruction of animal habitats to prevent spread of viruses.

Moreover, evidence points towards drastic educational, psychological and professional losses of consumers and their households. Implications from these range from wage loss due to decline in work hours, contagion fear, poverty, food insecurity to large-scale unemployment. During the Ebola outbreak, almost 16,000 children were orphaned. The 33-week lockdown led to disruption in education and loss of livelihoods. Production and distribution units were closed down, leading to

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apprehensions around food security. Untrained medical personnel were made to operate in quarantine facilities. These are just some of the myriad impacts of an epidemic at the micro level.

Concerning COVID-19, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has stated that the “economic uncertainty it has sparked will likely cost the global economy \$1 trillion in 2020” (WEF and UN 2020). Making this a reality, the European economy will be slowly sliding into recession by the next quarter as the Italian and German economies are particularly fragile. Besides, the Latin American economy is very vulnerable, with the Argentinian growth rate falling sharply. In Asia, Singapore is heading for a large recession with its GDP shrinking by 10.6%. China, dubbed as the “world’s factory,” is experiencing a sharp decline in its industrial production and manufacturing due to widespread lockdown and ban on movement of people. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations+3 tourism economy is currently facing a major slowdown, with both international and intranational movement being banned following contagion fear.

It is important to note here that the failure of pandemic preparedness has its price too. Unpreparedness may cause massive economic costs compared to having a sure-footed strategy in place. This is highlighted by the ventilator crisis that is currently ongoing in the United States (US).

Capitalism and Ventilator Crisis

With the high incidence of COVID-19 amongst the world population, an increasing need for healthcare equipment has been realised by all the nations, especially the US and Europe. Studies confirm that more than 30% of hospitalised COVID-19 patients are likely to need mechanical ventilation for recovering (Pan et al 2020). However, a drastic shortage of ventilators has come to the fore. Hospitals in the US have roughly 1,60,000 ventilators, which is not enough for treating the ever-increasing number of COVID-19 infected patients (more than 10,20,000). Unable to handle this, the governor of New York recently put out a plea for 40,000 ventilators that cost \$25,000 each. Further, the demand for drugs, anaesthetics and sedatives required for ventilator patients has increased by 51% in the US.

Unfortunately, the supply is diminishing fast, with suppliers not having enough inventory to meet the demand. This crisis is similarly being seen in Europe and other developed nations. For easy understanding, we have christened this situation as the “ventilator crisis.” To what do we owe the emergence of this widespread market failure?

It is of little doubt that policymakers and governments worldwide were aware of the necessity of preparing for the next pandemic since the 2002 SARS epidemic. The importance of developing affordable healthcare equipment and drugs, quick response systems, and consistent budget allocation towards sustaining good healthcare standards was unnervingly felt (Noyes 2002; Bigham et al 2009). Owing to this, production was ramped up in the US by a government firm for a short period until it was taken over by a major corporation, which later sidelined it for not being sufficiently profitable to the company. The corporation had excess capacity to produce cheap ventilators, which was left utilised. Pharmaceutical companies downscaled their efforts on developing a vaccine, as they believed their profits would be hurt in the prospect of a cure. Besides, across most of America and Europe, universal healthcare was given less attention. Its dire implications have been realised now because of the tremendous demand for ventilators during COVID-19. This is one of the many outcomes of a neo-liberal capitalist regime where the underlining motive is maximising corporate profits (Brown 2003). Global warming (Cléménçon 2010), high economic inequality (Cummins 2018), market failure (Hursh 2005) and stagnation of real wages (Montgomerie 2007) are some of the other outcomes. With greater privatisation of healthcare, marginal sections have been pushed into an abyss of negative net worth. Therein lies the genesis of the COVID-19 ventilator crisis.

Interventions

A very important factor leading to the high economic impact of novel outbreaks is the fear of contagion. The world has become a small place with enormous internet and media connectedness that span not only social networking but also secondary markets and transnational supply chains. Adverse social responses, mixed with

ignorance and lack of awareness, transform a novel outbreak into a “virtual pandemic.” Social responses are “societal reactions to disease outbreaks” (Fast et al 2015: 2) that range from anxiety, panic to violence, riots and migration. Societal panic during the SARS pandemic had cost the Chinese tourism industry approximately \$20.4 billion (Dombey 2004) and a more than 50% reduction in retail sales.

In its active phase, the foremost policy prescription for managing this “virtual pandemic” is limiting the spread of the disease itself while downscaling social responses towards it. Managing the economic burden of its aftermath would require economy-wide stimulus for demand shocks. Such shocks need to focus on augmenting consumption to neutralise unspent inventory and irregular supply shocks. Boosting consumer confidence in dairy and livestock products as well as tourism-related exports will be essential. After the outbreak recedes, there will be high consumer demand for food products and medicines, while that for durables will fall substantially. Besides, a phase of high unemployment would be observed in the short term, which has to be addressed by well-designed fiscal stimulus focusing on those people that were mostly affected by the pandemic. Multistakeholder handholding is essential during this crisis period, wherein all stakeholders will have to cooperate on agreements and legislations for outbreak containment and preventions (Sivaramakrishnan 2011), which include international monetary and trade agreements as well. In 2017, the World Bank took a lead in this regard by introducing pandemic bonds to support their Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) so as to channel critical funding to countries with high pandemic risk. Finally, establishing an epidemic emergency fund in line with the Pandemic Contingency Fund of the World Health Organization for fighting future disease outbreaks is the need of the hour.

Conclusions

It is of little doubt that novel disease outbreaks such as COVID-19 gather immense potential to have an impact on several sectors of a national as well as the global economy. Rapid urbanisation, fast increasing international travel and climate change

render these outbreaks into pandemics, making them a global phenomenon. Therefore, at this pressing time amidst the emergence of COVID-19, which has brought humanity to the brink of an existential crisis, it has become highly imperative to invest in total epidemic preparedness involving health and non-health interventions, research and development as well as capacity building at all levels.

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Encroachments on the Waterbodies in Tamil Nadu

S RAJENDRAN

Tamil Nadu has many legal provisions to protect its waterbodies. However, encroachment on waterbodies is rampant and many encroachers are resorting to violence to silence those who oppose them. Recurrent droughts in the state necessitate that these waterbodies be restored and protected, and encroachments are removed.

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Recurrent droughts in Tamil Nadu have prompted initiatives for saving and deepening of surface waterbodies to increase their storage levels. However, such efforts get marred by a strong presence of land-grabbers, who do not hesitate even from killing. Attacking, implicating in false cases, harassing, frequent transfers, etc, of the upright officials, informants, social workers, activists, and journalists who expose encroachments of the common property resources (CPRs), including waterbodies, have become common, while perpetrators are protected and supported. It suggests a strong nexus between land-grabbers, local leaders, bureaucrats, and political representatives. Tamil Nadu has 41,127 tanks. According to an estimate, the area irrigated by these tanks has reduced from 9.36 lakh hectares (ha) in 1960–61 to 4.38 lakh ha in 2015–16 (Narayanamoorthy and Alli 2018). One of the factors attributed to this loss is the encroachment of the waterbodies.

Increasing industrialisation, urbanisation, and a market-driven economy, all

result in such a drive for unlawfully encroaching large tracts of public land, mainly for real estate and cultivation purposes. We can understand this process through one instance in Mudalaipatti village of Kulithalai taluk from Karur district close to the Kaveri ayacut area (the area served by an irrigation project such as a canal, dam or a tank). Over the years, around 50 villagers slowly encroached on 39 acres of a water-retaining tank bed covering 198 acres. Owing to poor rainfall for many years, the village tank did not fill fully and became an easy target for local villagers to encroach upon to grow banana, coconut, oilseeds, pulses, and flowers. A few village elders revealed that this tank was endowed with rich flora and fauna of reed, nutgrass, edible tubers, fish, crab, and snail, and after encroachment, these disappeared. If the tank is filled,¹ in addition to Mudalaipatti, the groundwater table in the surrounding six villages—Posampatti, Adavathur, Ettarai, Mullikarumbur, Palayam, and Inampuliyur—will be recharged.

Grabbing of the Poramboke

A local farmer from Inampuliyur village, who grew rose and jasmine on their 1 acre plot, along with his son opposed this encroachment by approaching district authorities. Their repeated pleas

over 15 years went unheard. They approached the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court for relief, and the court directed the eviction of the grabbers in 2018. Consequently, officials marked illegally occupied land and houses constructed on the *poramboke*.² Sensing the threat of eviction, a few sold their conditional *patta* lands at throwaway prices. To divert the public attention and discourage the authorities, a temple with a budget of ₹1.5 crore was constructed right on the tank bund. Further, the enraged encroachers killed both the father and son. The court took suo motu cognisance and issued a notice for prompt evictions to restore the waterbody. This indeed led to evictions.

Article 48A of the Constitution says that the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country. Unfortunately, it is the state which most often violates this article. In the above-cited instance as well, the state had diverted 30 acres to establish a horticulture farm on the north-western side of the irrigation tank. Article 51A(g) makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to protect the environment, including the CPRs.

Earlier in Tamil Nadu, the responsibility and authority of the maintenance and management of waterbodies were vested with people. Any disputes related to misuse were settled at the village level. Over the years, ownership has been transferred to the state, which undermined and sidelined the role of local communities. The officials do not have a comprehensive idea about the local dynamics of politics, including conflicts and cooperative efforts by villagers in maintaining and protecting waterbodies. Although the Madras Water Board Act, 1930 had provisions for *kudimaramathu* (maintenance and repair of waterbodies by the people by contributing labour mostly during off-farm season), the government was unwilling to transfer waterbodies to the village panchayats (Rajendran 2018). Since 1949, the public works department (PWD) took over its control. Over time, people lost interest and the locals with power encroached upon the CPRs. There

have been initiatives to revive *kudimaramathu* for the repair of irrigation tanks, although it is still to be seen how much these will revive the practice in spirit (Rajendran 2018).

Despite several court rulings for the removal of encroachments on different CPRs, in most cases, these were not followed. There are specific acts to protect CPRs, but these have not prevented encroachment. The Tamil Nadu Land Encroachment Act, 1905, Tamil Nadu Land Encroachment (Amendment) Act, 1965, and the Tamil Nadu Protection of Tanks and Eviction of Encroachment Act, 2007³ are a few such acts. However, these are frequently bypassed, and there are many instances of granting *pattas* to such encroachers.⁴ Building structures on waterbodies blocking their flow leading to waterlogging and inundation during rains has become a common phenomenon (Sivasubramaniyan 2018).

A revealing example of flouting of rules is that of the state forest department that planted *karuvel* (black babul), encroaching on 100 acre area of the Karisalkulam tank (spread over 207 acre) in Amarapondi, Palani taluk of Dindigul district on a 10-year contract. Despite the trees being 15 years old now, the forest department has not cleared the trees. Though the PWD has allotted ₹15 lakh for desiltation under *kudimaramathu*, these standing trees affect the renovation work. In another case, a few large powerful farmers encroached upon a portion of tank land and laid *pucca* road across the Vangumadai tank in panchayat in Andipatti taluk of Theni district, despite complaints that this will obstruct water flow during the rainy season and bunds could get breached.

However, there are also instances where after realising the significance of saving and maintaining waterbodies, encroachers left the land without conflicts and the locals with their efforts restored the waterbodies, which not only provide them drinking water but also recharged the groundwater.

Conclusions

It is important to harness the heavy rainfall by preserving the waterbodies and increasing their storage capacity, thereby,

also increasing the groundwater levels. Water users' associations are meant to take care of the waterbodies in a "bottom-up" mode. The Tamil Nadu Farmers' Management of Irrigation Systems Act, 2000 enables the formation of such associations with farmers as members in the ayacut area. Unfortunately, elections for these people-centric democratic institutions are long due.

Besides making such institutions function effectively, it is also important that the competent authorities prevent land-grabbing and encroachment of waterbodies, and carry out time-bound inquiries and take appropriate punitive measures upon receiving complaints. A comprehensive survey of CPRs, including *poramboke* lands, is essential to quantify the extent of illegal encroachment. Under any circumstances, such commons, particularly water structures, should not be allotted for other purposes and appropriate amendments should be made in the existing acts to deal with it. Absence of support to those who are opposing encroachments and fall victim to the violence by the encroachers is unfortunate.

NOTES

- 1 In addition to rainwater, supply comes from Kattalaimettu Channel of Mayanur barrage in Kaveri.
- 2 *Poramboke* refers to public land used for community purposes like irrigation, cattle grazing and threshing.
- 3 Clause 12 of this act states that "the government may, in the public interest, alienate any part of the *poramboke* land under the control of PWD without interfering with storage capacity and water quality." Using this, and bypassing the core of the act, *pattas* are granted on the CPRs.
- 4 As is clear through government order Nos 854 (30 December 2006), 498 (5 November 2007), 711 (30 November 2007), 34 (23 January 2008), 43 (29 January 2010) and 372 (26 August 2014). Benefiting the encroachers on waterbodies, thus, is a clear violation of the public trust doctrine.

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Nehru's Enlightened Middle Way

RAJEEV BHARGAVA

It is a cliché that a deep division exists between the idea of India and of Bharat Mata. One is meant to be secular, liberal, modern, rational, open-minded, without qualms about learning from the West, even from imperial Britain, and is associated with those who speak English. The other is religiously nationalist, majoritarian, traditional, illiberal, conservative, narrow-minded, anti-Western, anti-Muslim and associated with Hindi speakers. The main exponent of the first is perceived to be Jawaharlal Nehru. The other is vigorously promoted by the main ideologues of the current government. No wonder, Nehru is the greatest ideological enemy of Hindutva. And it seems that for the moment Bharat Mata is winning hands down.

Purushottam Agrawal, editor of the book under review, agrees entirely with the assessment that Nehru and Hindutva ideologues are pitted against one another. But, in this outstandingly curated collection of essays and speeches by Nehru, he dismantles the framework within which this debate occurs.¹ For Nehru, Bharat Mata is simply a different vehicle to express the idea of India supported by him. In the introduction that precedes the selection of Nehru's writings on history, culture and the idea of India, Agrawal carefully shows that he was equally sensitive to the need of Bharat Mata in the Indian discourse. For Nehru, "Bharat Mata" was a way of fleshing out the idea of India. Differences between the two exist, no doubt, but similarities too abound. Both reflect an ideal, a social and ethical vision of a people—secular though not anti-religious, modern but not scornful of tradition, diverse but mindful of the requirements of unity, willing to learn from but not blindly imitative of the West, eschewing all hatred for the British but emphatically anti-imperialist, liberal and non-liberal, but not illiberal. In short, Nehru's thinking expresses the

REVIEW ARTICLE

Who Is Bharat Mata? On History, Culture and the Idea of India: Writings by and on Jawaharlal Nehru, edited and with an introduction by Purushottam Agrawal, *Speaking Tiger*, New Delhi, 2019; pp 474, ₹359.

genius of India—"to avoid extremes and follow the enlightened middles" and in doing so gave new, virtually identical sense to the two phrases, India and Bharat. The difference lay in two features in language and more importantly, in their emotional resonance (p xxxii). The idea of India can be discussed, debated, deliberated upon but is not revered. It is hard to love, or be devoted to it. Bharat Mata, on the other hand, can be adored, sung about, painted, sculpted, danced to, saluted, ritualised. In some contexts, for certain purposes, it might uplift one. But the main content of one is not any different from the other and both crystallise a forward-looking nation, yet rooted in tradition and heritage (p xiii). To differentiate them as if they belonged to distinct species creates a false dichotomy, with enormous social and political consequences.

Who Is Bharat Mata?

Agrawal is among the first to take seriously the question "Who is Bharat Mata?" The "who" question seeks the reference of the term. This is different from asking the equally important question: "What is Bharat Mata?" The "what" question can be answered by asking what Bharat Mata means, its real and desired characteristics, what it is and what it should be. The "who" question tells us where these features are found, who its bearers are. For Nehru, as Agrawal shows, Bharat Mata is not an ancient Vedic goddess or a reified transcendental idea to be worshipped. It is only secondarily embodied in territory. Rather, it refers to "these millions of

Indian people" and therefore "victory (jaya) to Bharat Mata can only mean 'victory to the these people'" (p xxxii). This is vintage Nehru. He does not abandon the term, treat it disrespectfully or casually. He redefines it. Given this reference of the term, one disrespects mother India when one oppresses these people, exploits, demeans, marginalises, excludes, humiliates or mistreats them. These nasty acts can be performed by insiders as much as outsiders. Imperial Britain disrespected Bharat Mata (for instance when it reduced millions of Indians to penury or refused them political freedoms), but so does any one section of India harming another (caste, gender, and religion-related domination). Mother India is harmed when any part of it is harmed. It also follows that the term cannot be used in a deeply diverse country such as ours as a "violent challenge to the integrity of any religious group of this nation or anyone who uses some other metaphor to express his or her love for the country" (p xxxiii). Bharat Mata is wedded to India's rich diversity.

Agrawal concludes that for Nehru this also answers the other deep question that is frequently raised by cynics about the stability, identity or authenticity of India as a nation state. These critics fail to realise that the Indian people are conducting a great self-experiment. They have put before themselves a difficult task to transform "an ancient and continuing civilization into a modern nation state defined by diversity, accommodation and the best, most humane and enlightened elements of both tradition and modernity" (p xxx). This is their chosen destiny, their purpose, why they are there at all. Implicit then in Nehru's vision of the nation is that it is a deeply different people, self-consciously bound together by common or overlapping concerns about their past, present and future. This self-conscious awareness of commonality is

not genetically encoded. Nor does it drop from the sky but grows when people talk and listen to one another and, through oral and written communication, understand each other. So I would add, the objective of nation-building cannot be achieved unless people saw themselves as engaged in actual or potential conversation. It is entirely apt to say that a nation exists only as long as there is a continuous conversation among its members about what it was, is, will and should be.

A disruption of this conversation is the undoing of a nation. Anyone uninterested in this conception because he already has a preconceived notion of what it should be is already a disruptor, working against the nation. Those who do not want to converse with others show a deep disregard for it, make a virtue of not showing consideration or compassion for others. They think of self-restraint and civility, the prerequisites of conversation, as a mark of weakness. Such disruptors, espousing a uniform Hindu Rashtra, are undoing the Indian nation, causing it enormous harm, straying from its chosen purpose. Those who want to build a purely Hindu nation have generated notions “out of ignorant fantasies of the past or distorted imaginations of the future” (p xxxviii). Such ideas stem from a deep unease with one’s past, traditions, even one’s own religions and spring from an acute sense of insecurity, lack of self-confidence and massive inferiority complex (p xxx). Only this explains why such people want a break from the past and unthinkingly emulate the West.

Go for the Enlightened Middle

The other equally important point in Agrawal’s introduction is about Nehru’s mode of thinking. And all said and done, this is what made him quintessentially Indian (p xxxiii). In the dialectic of thought, one may go from one extreme to another, but eventually one should settle down somewhere in the middle. But not just any middle position. The key word here is “enlightened.” If one has really thought through the issue, really or imaginatively experienced all crucial sides of the matter, actually felt the pull of opposites, then one would arrive at

an “enlightened” middle. Furthermore, this middle has no “conceited claims of finality.” We, humans, must eschew an emphatic conception of truth. This, according to Agrawal, is what the best of Indian tradition has taught us.

Following the enlightened middle does not mean sitting on the fence, being wishy-washy, or arriving at a bad, indefensible compromise. It means balancing competing and equally valid claims, accommodating them, and tempering adolescent revolutionary zeal. It means not abolition of everything given but, as the German philosopher, Hegel, who surely learnt a thing or two from Indian ways of thinking, called dialectical overcoming. Cancelling the past and yet preserving it; not a radical break with the past or with tradition but its reappropriation by giving it a different meaning.

Let me elaborate. Nehru was committed to a certain model of contextual moral reasoning, a form of reasoning that accepts that all reality has a moral dimension and that this morality consists of multiple values. To accept its multi-value nature is to acknowledge that its constitutive values do not always sit easily with one another. On the contrary, they frequently conflict.

Some degree of internal discord, and therefore a fair amount of instability, is an integral part of all ethical problem-solving. Because of this, moral reasoning forever requires attempts at reconciliation and compromise. No general a priori rule of resolving these conflicts exists, no pre-existing hierarchy among values that enables us to decide that, no matter what the context, a particular value must override everything else. Each time the matter presents itself differently and it will be differently resolved. If this is true, our moral understanding cannot be straitjacketed into well-delineated and explicitly stated rules (Taylor 1994). This form of thinking recognises that conflicts between individual rights and group rights, or between equality, liberty, and fraternity cannot always be adjudicated by recourse to some general and abstract principle. Rather, they can be settled only case by case and may require a fine balancing of competing claims. The eventual outcome may not be wholly

satisfactory to either claimant but may still be reasonably satisfactory to both. Such multi-value thinking encourages accommodation—not the giving up of one value for the sake of another, but their reconciliation and possible harmonisation so that apparently incompatible concepts and values may operate without changes to their basic content.

This endeavour to make concepts, viewpoints, and values work simultaneously does not amount to a morally objectionable compromise. This is so because nothing of importance is being given up for the sake of something less significant, something without value, or even with negative value. Rather, what is pursued is a mutually agreed-upon middle way that combines elements from two or more equally valuable entities. The roots of such attempts at reconciliation and accommodation lie in an absence of dogmatism, in a willingness to experiment—to think at different levels and in separate spheres and in a readiness to make and accept decisions on a provisional basis. The pursuit of this middle way captures a way of thinking characterised by the following dictum: “Why look at things in terms of this or that, why not try to have both this and that?” (Austin 1993).

This non-dogmatic thinking is an aspect of Indian tradition that is worth keeping alive. Indeed, it must be continuously reinvented. It is fundamentally non-ideological. Ideologies contain clear directives for action; that indeed is their function. But such directives are necessarily short-lived. They change as the situation changes on the ground. An ideological dictum is fixed but valuable only when temporarily so. To turn into a general principle and shift it to the core of our moral thinking is foolish. When people do this, they stop thinking because they allow ideology to do the thinking for them. There are, alas, no ready-made answers for life’s most important problems. Every little thing has to be thought through. All claims have to be examined. All relevant interests taken into account, all values factored in. Thinking cannot be simple-minded or innocent but complex, sophisticated, experienced. And good practice must be guided not only by this kind of situational thinking but by persuasive argument,

consensus-seeking and moral judgment. Nehru exemplified this approach.

Religion and Secularism

This way of thinking was illustrated in Nehru's conception of nationalism but can also be illustrated by Nehru's views on religion and secularism.

Nehru was unhappy with the term "religion." In his *An Autobiography* (1936), he says "The word 'religion' has lost all precise significance (if it ever had it!) and only causes confusion and gives rise to interminable debate and argument. It would be far better if it was dropped from use altogether." Why? Because for Nehru religion referred both to (i) ethical teachings of self-realisation and fulfilment which humans who wish to lead a good life cannot do without (pp xxv-xxviii) and to (ii) particular institutionalised, power-laden, status-ridden and doctrinalised systems of beliefs and practices sharply demarcated from and hostile to other similar systems. For Nehru, this second conception of religion was a source of discord and violence. He respected the first dimension of religion, and found its other dimension repugnant. Hence his ambivalence for the term. He wished to disentangle its two senses but since they had become virtually inseparable, he wanted to drop the term altogether. But given its general acceptance, he obviously could not. This is why he concluded that "the use of the same word with different meanings makes mutual comprehension still more difficult."

The most important feature of ethical teachings in India is its multiplicity and fluidity, its "pantheistic atmosphere" (p xxviii). Religion as ethical teachings was not a closed system. Being open, it did not discourage people from seeking solution from other, very different ethical teachings. It encouraged multiple belonging and easy movement from one to the other because the Indian thought environment encouraged translation from one system to another. This is possible if every "ethic of self-realisation," that includes both god-dependent and god-free ethics can be treated as a way of relating to the ultimate, in whichever way the latter is defined or understood. This translation can continue as long as

there are no theological, social or political incentives to block it. For example, translation becomes impossible if one assumes that there is irreducible non-equivalence of the terms sought to be translated if two terms simply can never refer to the same entity. So, here we confront two irreducibly different entities. If the worlds centred on the two entities are incompatibly different, then one can either live in one or in the other, not in both. This results in a very different multi-theistic universe without conversation, a world peopled by groups that are internally intimate but fundamentally and irreconcilably estranged from one another. This happens when we work with an emphatic conception of truth such as there is only one true or real God and all other gods are seen to be false.

This distinction between those who follow true religion and believers in false religion (them and us) can slide easily under some circumstances into a radical difference between friend and enemy. The enemy outside (infidel) and the enemy within (heretic). Add to this the need to keep one's flock together and you have rigidly guarded boundary, a set of well-armed gatekeepers. Nehru was firmly against this way of thinking about religion. Religion must continue to connote multiple, intercommunicating, ethical teachings. In that sense, he himself partook of religion in one sense (an ethics which related to something morally higher than humans but was independent of gods and God). He knew that there are many such religio-ethical world views and each is equally important to meet the challenge of "spiritual emptiness facing our technological civilisation" (p xxvi). This religio-philosophical culture was entirely responsible for India's celebrated diversity, tolerance and respect for difference. On the other hand, religion in the other sense, a comprehensive ideology pertaining to spiritual, ethical, social and political matters with its institutional hierarchies and that is associated with one group sharply demarcated from other rival groups is deeply problematic and must be continually be called into question, challenged.

Nehru was similarly dissatisfied with "secular," a term to which Agrawal pays

less attention than it deserves.² He believed that we use "secular" and call our state a secular state, because we have not yet found a better term. What is his conception of the secular state? First, the state cannot identify with any single religious ethics or declare it to be the state religion. The ethical ends of any one religion, no matter how lofty, cannot become the ends of the state. This goes fundamentally against the grain of plurality. The state may be nourished by *all or by none*. Even if the majority of a country owes allegiance to one of them, so that the general climate is coloured as he believed India's is with the Hindu ethos, the state should not be Hindu. He was particularly critical of the "Hindu Rashtra." Or a Hindu nation state.

It may sound very nice to some people that we will create a Hindu Rashtra but I cannot understand what it means. Hindus are in the majority in this country and whatever they wish will be done. But the moment you talk of a Hindu Rashtra, you speak in a language which no other country except one can comprehend and that country is Pakistan because they are familiar with this concept. They can immediately justify their creation of an Islamic nation by pointing to the world that we are doing something similar. ... Hindu rashtra can only reduce the status of those who are not Hindus. ... You may say patronisingly that you will look after the Muslims or Christians or others ... but do you think any race or individual will accept for long the claim that they are looked after while we sit high above them? (Gopal and Iyengar 2003)

Thus, since all states in the modern era are nation states, Nehru opposed all narrow nationalisms, including religious ones. In religiously diverse societies, all religious nationalisms are exclusionary.

Second, a secular state cannot be anti-religious. It is not a state where religion as such is discouraged, or pushed into oblivion. How could he indiscriminately oppose religion or espouse its absence, given his acknowledgement of the indispensability and value of the ethical dimension of religions? He also appreciated that since many faiths express themselves publicly, a secular state must accept the public presence of ethical Religions. There should, he insisted, be "free play for all religions." A secular state must protect freedom of religious beliefs and practices, including, of course, freedom

for those who have no religion in the conventional sense such as atheists. Indeed, Nehru goes a step further and says that it must honour all faiths equally and give them equal opportunity. This is the duty of a secular state in a religiously diverse society.

But what should a secular state do in relation to the power-laden dimension of organised religion? How should it respond to its power hierarchies, its dogmatic doctrines, to inter-religious rivalries, hate speech and inter-religious violence?

First, if religious tensions and conflicts surface, then a secular state must ensure that all religious communities be at peace with one another, that there be, to use Gandhi's term, "communal harmony." Second, it is the duty of a secular state to undermine inter-religious domination. Since communalism consists largely in fostering inter-religious rivalry or domination, a secular state must oppose communalism, regardless of whether it stems from the minority or the majority. Unlike what is widely believed, "Nehru opposed both majority and minority communalisms, both full of admiration for Hitler" (p xxix). Indeed, it is the duty of both minority and majority communities not to jeopardise the ideals of a secular state. Yet, a minority community, more vulnerable in a democratic polity needs protection from majoritarian domination, and therefore solely for this purpose it must be given community-specific minority rights. Third, since religion is also ridden with intra-religious domination—a condition in which some members of a religious community oppress, exclude, discriminate against, humiliate and degrade other members of their own community. He provides three forms of such domination. The first was religiously justified inter-caste domination, the ugliest expression of which is the practice of untouchability. Nehru says that "the word secular conveys something much more to him, although that might not be its dictionary meaning—the idea of social and political equality." A state that encourages or tolerates such deeply inegalitarian, casteist practices is not secular (Gopal and Iyengar 2003). Second, against gender-based discrimination. As early as 1934, addressing Prayag Vidya Peeth, he said

Our civilisation, our customs, our laws have all been made by man and he has taken good care to keep himself in a superior position and to treat the woman as chattel and a plaything to be exploited for his own advantage and amusement. Under this continuous pressure the woman has been unable to grow and develop her capacities to her fullest and then man has blamed for her backwardness. (Iyengar 2007)

Since, many of these customs (purdah, *ghunghat*) and laws (marriage-related laws) are bound up with religion, a secular state must challenge such religious practices (Iyengar 2007).

A third instance of intra-religious domination to which he draws attention is the domination of ordinary persons by religious clerics, the ability of bigots and fanatics to hold them captive.

Brahmins are prepared to march shoulder to shoulder with the Maulvies, the priests from the Ghats fraternise with the mullahs from the mosques against any freedom and equality-oriented internal reform. (Gupta 2006)

Given this socially oppressive and politically meddling stance of religious elites, Nehru argued that the "high priests of religion cannot take decisions on social and political questions." Thus, a secular state must also inhibit the continuing attempt by the high priests of religion to impose their views and norms on ordinary men and women.

On Cultural Amnesia

Now, to come to the last major issue. Agrawal rightly points out that Nehru understood that no political community can live without cultural amnesia.

Memory defines individual and collective identity. It implies a serious *moral responsibility of choosing what to remember and what to forget ...* If nurtured merely emotionally, without any rational negotiation of the past and an ethical imagination of the future, memory leads to disastrous delusions. The cultural memory of India cannot be narrow and exclusionist. (p vii)

I agree almost entirely with the thought and feeling underlying these statements. I believe it also captures Nehru's own understanding of the need and ethical uses of collective memory. How else do we understand his monumental effort in writing the *Discovery of India*? Yet, this is precisely where we need to pause to reflect deeper on this issue because many of our current problems stem at least

partly from how we have imagined our past, particularly our recent past.

How have we handled the awful events leading to the partition of the subcontinent and the violence that followed? If not official, at the very least, our unofficial memory of recent past is patchy and selective. Ethics has played an important role in its construction, but the moral psychology that underlay it has probably been simple-minded. The unofficial default policy of the state is "let bygones be bygones, to forget the bitter recent past" and to move on. The reason is the fear that "there is a dragon living on the patio and we had better not provoke it."³ If memory of suffering is kept alive, will not reprisal occur in future, opportune moments? Forgetting is necessary for civic peace. Such a view has a long pedigree.

For instance, Thomas Hobbes argued that suppression of memories of past wrongs was essential because if society is treated as a building made of stones then some stones that have an "irregularity of figure take more room from others" and so must be discarded. Hobbes's covenant was a device to incorporate social amnesia into the foundation of society. But this view runs into two problems. First, forgetting cannot be brought about intentionally. Of the many Arabs, Turks, Persians and Afghans who arrived, only some came as invaders between the 8th and 18th centuries, but for many Hindus, all Muslims continue to have the mindset of invaders who can at any time kill, destroy and convert them. The conquest of Quebec by the English happened more than two centuries ago but for Quebec nationalists their nationalist project "involves a reconquest of the conquest." A large part of nationalist agenda all over the world, Michael Ignatieff rightly reminds us, is about settling old scores. In so many countries, people remarkably similar in essential respects appear to go at each other's throat simply because once upon a time one ruled over the other. A simple strategy of forgetting has simply not worked. Besides, it is to live in a fool's paradise to imagine that as grievances recede into the past and are half-forgotten, they will somehow cease to be real. As Ignatieff puts it "Collective

Myth has no need of personal memory or experience to retain its force" (1993). Only an appropriate engagement with the past makes then for a liveable common future. If not properly addressed grievances and resentments resurface.

Forgetting past wrongs anyway fails to achieve its putative objective, a point to which Jeremy Waldron (1992) has drawn our attention:

When we are told to let bygones be bygones, we need to bear in mind also that the forgetfulness being urged on us is seldom the blank slate of historical oblivion. Thinking quickly fills up the vacuum with plausible tales of self-satisfaction, on the one side, and self-deprecation on the other.

Beneficiaries of injustice then come to believe that gains accrue to them due to the virtue of their race or culture, and victims too easily accept that their misfortune is caused by inherent inferiority.

Second, it is doubtful if forgetting is a good strategy for repairing wounds or achieving reconciliation. When a person is wronged, he is made to not only suffer physically but is mentally scarred, the most injurious of which is the damage to his sense of self-respect, if he is left with any residue of it. As Jeffrie Murphy (1990) points out, when a person is wronged he receives a message of his marginality and irrelevance. The wrongdoer conveys that in his scheme of things the victim counts for nothing. Since self-esteem hinges upon critical opinion of the other, the message sent by the wrongdoer significantly lowers the self-esteem of the wronged. The demand that past injustices be forgotten does not address this loss of self-esteem. Indeed, it inflicts further damage.

To be sure, former victims and fragmented societies eventually need to get on with their lives rather than be consumed by their past suffering. Victims need to forget just about as much as they need to remember. But real forgetting comes with addressing wrongs and acknowledging past injustices. People who carry deep resentment and grievance against one another are hardly likely to build a society together. I believe timing is the essence of the issue here. Forgetting too quickly or without redressal, by failing to heal adequately, inevitably

brings with it a society haunted by its past. One cannot forget entirely, too soon and without a modicum of justice. Moreover, while specific acts of wrongdoing need to be forgotten eventually, a general sense of the wrong and of the horror of evil acts must never be allowed to recede from collective memory. Such remembering is crucial to the prevention of wrongdoing in the future.

So, while Agrawal is right about Nehru's understanding of the ethics of memory (we need to make ethical judgments about what to remember or forget), I do not think in practice he got the balance right. We have not engaged appropriately enough with our recent bitter past. In short, I do not think we have properly addressed the wrongs that occurred on either side of our current borders or those committed largely against Muslims in post-independence India. More discussion, deliberation, acknowledgement, proper memorialisation is necessary. Is it all Nehru's fault? I recall an event where the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz was asked to recite one of his famous poems. Now, Faiz had a heavy Punjabi accent which, in the eyes of many, did not quite do justice to his own Urdu poetry. So, one of the listeners could not help saying to him, "Faiz sahib, you write so well, why don't you recite equally well?" Faiz immediately retorted. "Sab ham hi karen, kuch tum bhi karo" (Is it my responsibility to do everything, don't you think you must do something too!) This could well be Nehru's reply to his political followers. We who love, respect and follow Nehru have not done enough to carry his legacy further and are currently paying a heavy price for this neglect.

Agrawal's edited collection, with a lucid and elegant introduction could not be more timely. Nehru was no unthinking Westernised intellectual. He was not contemptuous of Hindu traditions or for that matter any religious tradition. He was not blindly anti-religious or pure-secular. But he was firmly against the ideological vision of Hindutva and no one knows this better than Hindutva ideologues. They know that he was loved and admired even by his critics (pp xv–xvi). They hate him precisely because he earned the

trust, respect and faith of people "the hard way, without catering to their baser instincts and phony sentiments" (p xxxvii). And therefore, they fully understand that "to have lasting success, they must distort his memory, tarnish his image, belittle his towering personality and erase his impression from the Indian mind" (p xiii). Not able to answer the charges against him or fight this calumny, it is up to us, those who passionately admire his thought but can still dispassionately see his flaws (p xxxvii), to rescue his subtle and complex thoughts from Hindutva's onslaught. The need is greater because unlike what many think they remain relevant in India today.

At a time, "when we are divided like never before and where an educated public is misinformed like never before," a necessary book such as this could not have come from a better scholar.

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NOTES

- 1 The book covers a large ground—on India's past and future, its domestic and foreign policy, on nationalism and the national movement, on philosophy, literature and science, on culture, religion and spirituality. In fact, one whole section is devoted to how he is viewed by significant others from Gandhi to Vajpayee. In this review, I focus only on a few of these topics.
- 2 For a detailed account, see Bhargava (2017).
- 3 Quoted from Rosenberg (1997).

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Measuring Access, Quality and Relevance in Higher Education

PANKAJ MITTAL, ANJALI RADKAR, ANITHA KURUP, ASHWANI KHAROLA, BHUSHAN PATWARDHAN

Gross enrolment ratio is a widely accepted indicator to measure the level of participation in education. It is proposed that the eligible enrolment ratio could be a better indicator instead. A study of five-year data of 10 different countries highlights its significance. In addition, it is also critical to reimagine higher education as beyond general university degrees, and develop a complementary vertical of equal status of skill and vocational education and enhance employment opportunities.

Universities as centres for creation and transmission of knowledge play a key role in building a symbiotic relationship between the nation state and society. Over the last two decades, the interest of first-generation learners in higher education in India has led to redefining the teaching-learning process, making it more inclusive for the disadvantaged population that is entering the portals of higher education. Therefore, we need a strategy that respects equity in higher education while expanding the vocational education vertical and realigning employment opportunities being created by the new knowledge economy. Higher education in a country provides the much-needed impetus for growth and development, thereby benefiting both the individual and society (Haas and Hadjar 2019).

The rapid expansion of higher education across the world has led to an increased number of universities and colleges, thereby providing greater access to post-secondary education to a large number of students (Declercq and Verboven 2018). As enrolment trends in higher education showed a steep rise, competing countries focused on increasing student enrolment in an attempt to catch up with the developed countries. However, real growth and development are possible only when the quality and relevance of higher education is assured. While expanding the facilities for higher education, sufficient attention must be paid to the basic purpose of higher education.

There is an urgent need to balance the demand and supply of educated manpower through an optimal enrolment policy (Boes and Pflaumer 2006; Lukka 1974). The disconnect between the higher education sector and the evolving employment market raises a question about the

relevance of university degrees. This changed scenario is leading to overqualified, under-skilled unemployed youth that, in turn, is creating dissent and disillusionment. This is true for India and a few other developing Commonwealth countries that have retained the colonial model of higher education, with little change to meet the contemporary challenges. Against this background, there is a need to reimagine Indian universities based on our own history and culture relevant to contemporary needs and future trends (Patwardhan 2020).

Higher Education in India

Traditionally, universities in India were established to focus on promoting scholarship and freedom of thought. The centres of higher learning such as Taxila (fifth century BC) and Nalanda (sixth century BC) thrived in a climate of eclecticism, freedom, and cross-cultural knowledge-sharing spanning philosophy, arts, humanities social and natural science (Kurup and Singai 2017). The colonial period in India witnessed a transformation of native traditional higher education in response to the expectations of the rulers during the period. The Westernised construct of universities established by the British rule in India in 1857 at Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay were institutional transplants from Great Britain (Basu 2012). Macaulay, in his minutes on Indian education in 1835, described that the purpose of the universities in India was to produce “a new generation of English-speaking Indians loyal to the British crown to act as an army of clerks” (Evans 2002).

Post-independence India had the twin challenge of increasing literacy rates on the one hand, and promoting the development of science and technology by building institutions of excellence in the higher education sector on the other. The initial focus remained on expanding the formal education base, and school education received the maximum attention. However, in the last three decades, India witnessed an unprecedented expansion of the higher education sector. At present, the higher education sector consists of 37.4 million students, across

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993 universities, 39,931 colleges, and 10,725 stand-alone institutions as compared to 0.2 million students and up to 20 universities in 1950–51 (AISHE 2019).

India claims to be the third-largest system in the world after China and the United States (US) in terms of enrolment, and largest in the world in terms of the number of higher education institutions. This expansion is characterised by “islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity” (Altbach 2014). Inequalities of different kinds characterise the higher education sector in India. For example, the types of institutions, institutions of excellence, public universities, private universities, and deemed to be universities reflect the inequalities of resources, financial and human, along with the skewed distribution of students that represent different caste, class, gender, and urban and rural background. There is a need to reform Indian higher education by linking it to the changing employment needs at local, national, and global levels. Thus, it is crucial to address the quality of education and its relevance while planning an expansion to increase access to higher education. In India, successful completion of the 12th grade at the higher secondary school level is basic eligibility for enrolment in higher education. Therefore, eligibility for higher education also needs to be considered while measuring its access.

Access to Higher Education

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is a universally accepted indicator for analysing enrolments in higher education (Wu et al 2019). Typically, GER is the ratio of the number of enrolments in higher education to the total population in the age group of 18–23 years. Generally, a high GER indicates a high degree of participation. The GER in higher education drastically differs in developed and developing countries. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) data, the GER in higher education has increased from 19.4 in 2010–11 to 26.3 in 2018–19. India has made significant progress in higher education during the last three decades. The increase in the GER of India in this decade is almost double from 13.2 in 2003 (Thorat 2006). There seems to be a proportionate expansion in

the number of universities that increased 3.87 times, colleges that increased 3.12 times, and the increase in the number of students being 3.65 times. However, the Indian GER for higher education remains lower than the current global average of 29. There are several reasons for this. We discuss here various issues related to the increasing GER, as well as its relevance to India.

We have studied five years' (2013–17) data for 10 selected countries across the world, including developed, and developing and populous countries. Considering the fact that no unexpected variations in data are observed, we have taken data of 2017 as a reference year. The GER values in higher education show that developed nations such as the US, United Kingdom (UK) as well as emerging economies such as Brazil and Indonesia are ahead of India (Table 1).

Various factors such as enrolment, retention, and completion of secondary school education are known to influence the GER in higher education of a country (Gao and Chen 2010). Currently, India is facing serious challenges due to low enrolments and retention at the school level. Additionally, as witnessed recently, the enormous number of migrant labourers brings with it the challenge of the education of their children, which are not sufficiently recognised or addressed. Furthermore, the contradictions and contestations of the formal schooling system, which is struggling to close the gap between the marginalised and the

privileged despite affirmative action, pose serious setbacks to realise the fundamental right to education. Gender-related factors such as early marriage, childcare, and domestic responsibilities, availability of toilets and distance of the school from home, especially for girls, coupled with family labour, economic constraints and the disconnect of education with their daily lives have remained real obstacles for access and retention in schools among the poor. This situation leads to significant school dropouts, drastically reducing educationally eligible population for enrolment in higher education, resulting in a lower GER in higher education for India. Obviously, this problem cannot be resolved by increasing the number of colleges or universities or by promoting degrees through distance or online mode. For a meaningful increase in the GER, it is necessary to improve the quality of school education and link higher education to skills and vocation, thereby making it attractive to the student population.

Appropriateness of GER

In India, only 26.3% of the students in the relevant age group (18–23 years) are enrolled in the institutions of higher education. The GER in higher education for India is lower as compared to developed nations because a large population of students in the relevant age group is simply not eligible to enrol in colleges because they have not successfully completed the 12th grade higher secondary education. Hence, focusing on the expansion of higher education to increase GER is misplaced. In other words, India needs to focus on increasing the number of students completing higher secondary schools, thereby enabling an increase in the number of students eligible for a college education. It should also be noted that the availability, accessibility, affordability, as well as quality of higher education and its relevance for employment have a significant bearing on GER.

It is against this background that we hypothesise that GER may not be the appropriate measure or indicator for developing countries like India because of a large gap between the number of students available in the age group of

Table 1: Comparison and Inter Alia Difference between GER and EER

No	Country	Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) 2017	Eligible Enrolment Ratio (EER) 2017	Inter Alia Difference 2017	Wage and Salaried Workers (%) [*] 2016
1	US	88.2	93.5	5.3	90.1
2	Germany	70.3	91.2	20.9	89.6
3	France	65.6	75.5	9.9	88.1
4	UK	60.0	63.1	3.1	84.5
5	Brazil	51.3	78.6	27.2	68.1
6	China	49.1	72.9	23.8	63.6
7	Indonesia	36.4	57.7	21.2	48.9
8	India	27.4 [#]	64.9	37.5	20.9
9	South Africa	22.4	46.6	24.2	84.8
10	Pakistan	9.4	43.3	33.9	38.9

^{*}Wage and salaried workers' total (% of total employment) modelled by the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate.

[#]Value as per AISHE data is 26.3.

Source: Authors' calculations based on UNESCO Institute of Statistics data.

18–23 and those eligible, inter alia, to enter in higher education.

Eligible Enrolment Ratio

We propose that the eligible enrolment ratio (EER), based on the eligible population in the relevant age group, may be considered as a more appropriate indicator to measure the access to higher education. The EER can be defined as the ratio of the number of students enrolled in higher education to the number of students who have successfully completed 12th grade in the age group 18–23 years. The EER computed in this manner seems to be a more fair and judicious measurement of enrolment as it focuses on eligibility and optimises the precision of the indicator.

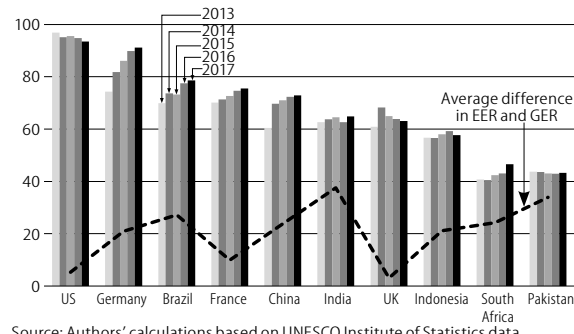
As the data on the number of students who have passed 12th grade in the relevant age group is not readily available, we used data relating to completion rate (CR). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, CR is defined as the number of persons in the relevant age group who have completed the last grade of a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group (Loeb and Duff 1974). Therefore, EER can be expressed in terms of the equation,

$$\text{EER} = \frac{\text{GER}}{\text{CR}}$$

This equation has been used for determining EER of 10 different countries, both from developed and developing economies of the world. The data on GER and CR was collected from the databank of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics for the period of five years from 2013 to 2017. The missing data for CR was calculated using a forecasting tool incorporating a linear regression model (Nadler and Kros 2007). The 2017 CR for the UK and US are about 95%, France 87%, and Germany 77%. Interestingly, 2017 CR for India is 42.3%, indicating the maximum limit for GER. This means that even if 100% of those completing the 12th grade enrol for higher education, still the GER cannot be more than 42.3%.

Although, GER is internationally acknowledged measure of enrolment, it needs some standardisation and correction to portray a valid scenario. A comparison

Figure 1: EER and Difference in EER and GER, 2017



Source: Authors' calculations based on UNESCO Institute of Statistics data.

of higher education access values across the countries is valid only when they are at par at the juncture of enrolment. Therefore, we compared the EER thus obtained to the GER of respective countries. It was observed that the increase in both the GER and EER was gradual during the five years of 2013–17 across all the selected countries. However, the absolute difference between the EER values of developed and developing countries was much smaller than the difference in the GER values of the same countries. This scenario probably emerged due to the fact that the measure of EER enables the comparison of these countries on a level playing field. Therefore, we suggest that the application of eligibility as a condition might provide a better realistic picture to know the correct level of participation for higher education.

A graphical representation of the five-year EER for the selected countries and differences in the GER and EER for 2017 is shown in Figure 1. Ideally, in a good education system, the difference between the GER and EER should be minimum. The smaller the gap between the GER and EER, the better the quality of the education system as a whole. A specific comparison between the GER and EER for 2017 along with inter alia difference between them is shown in Table 1. The ranking of the GER and EER of the top-two and bottom-two countries has not changed. Interestingly, it is seen that both the GER and EER are high for developed nations, such as the US, Germany, and France. Indonesia's GER (36.4) is higher than India; however, its EER (57.7) is less. Pakistan remains the last among selected countries both in GER (9.4) and EER (43.3). Surprisingly, the EER of the UK is exceptionally low, in fact, even lower

than India. A deeper study is necessary to understand the underlying reasons for this.

India ranks at number six with the EER as an indicator for access, two positions up as of the GER. Thus, our results suggest that for countries like India, EER can be considered as an appropriate indicator

for measuring the level of participation in higher education.

The difference between GER and EER is less than 10 percentage points for most developed countries, which indicates a relatively stable and mature education system. For emerging economies, it is between 20 percentage points and 30 percentage points. It should be noted that the difference between the GER and EER for India is 37.5 percentage points for 2017, the highest of all 10 countries. This high difference between the GER and EER indicates a huge gap between the “population eligible” and “eligible population.” In India, a slight improvement in this difference over the period of five years is observed. This could be attributed to the success of government programmes, which may have resulted in reducing dropouts and retention at higher secondary levels. The gap in the GER and EER can be further narrowed down only when the school system is further strengthened.

Higher Education Perspective

We question the rationale of GER as a stand-alone parameter to measure the level of participation in higher education for developing countries like India, where the problem is not much about access to higher education, but it is about the state of school education. The problem

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of a large number of dropouts in the school needs to be addressed first as these are the potential entrants to higher education. In India, the real bottleneck in higher education is an insufficient number of students who are eligible for entry into university education. There is a need to recognise that in India the shift from education to work starts from the age of 15 years in search of livelihood. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017–18 data reveal that 15.6% of the population of the age group of 15–19 had entered into the labour market. Among these, 11.6% were working and 4% were looking for a job. The compulsion of early entry into the labour market is mainly caused by poverty.

This also explains why countries like the us have remained at the top in the list, both in terms of the GER and EER. The difference between the GER and EER was less than 10 percentage points for developed countries. This indicates the success of their higher secondary schooling system. A study of the us youth conducted in 2002 and 2012 shows that over 84% of them had enrolled for some post-secondary course. The same data further reveals that 33.3% had completed a bachelor's degree; 8.7% received an associate's degree while the remaining 42% got some undergraduate certificate (Lauff et al 2014). The same distribution of university students in the us shows

that only a third of them complete their graduation, yet many of them are employed. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the different forms of completion of education that accommodate the varying ability of students.

As per Trow (2006), developed countries portray universalisation of higher education as an important direction for the future. However, whether this is the right direction remains a key question. In the Indian higher education landscape, students have a very limited opportunity of continuing education of their interests at their own pace. It was worrying to note that the difference between the GER and EER in India was about 38 percentage points, which was the highest among 10 countries studied for comparison. This indicates the poor state of the school system linked to lesser access to higher education.

Alternate Career Paths

There is a need to develop attractive alternate career paths linked to skills and vocational education that will equip students for employment and career advancement. Unfortunately, in India, there is only one form of completion, that is, successful graduation. Those who are unsuccessful, do not get any form of certification based on the credits earned, which can help these students in getting suitable employment. It must be mentioned that the draft National

Education Policy (NEP), 2019 has rightly recommended multiple entry and exit options with a focus on liberal education as well as skills and vocation. The National Academic Credit Bank proposed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) may provide a formal structure to ensure smooth transfer and redemption of credits to get degrees as per students' convenience.

Agreeably, the quality of higher education must be the hallmark of policy for any country. Countries like the us are able to effectively manage the knowledge economy and also draw a large number of international students because of high quality education linked with skills and employability. One of the reasons for the high GER for developed countries is internationalisation, which needs to be factored. Many developed countries, especially the us, Australia, and the uk, attract a large number of international students. The World Bank data for 2017 shows that among the total enrolled students, 17.9% in the uk, 10.2% in France, and 8.4% in Germany are international students. In 2017, among the enrolled international students in the world, 19%, that is, close to one-fifth, were enrolled in the us alone. It must be noted that the number of international students also contribute to enrolments in the respective countries. As against this, in India, the share of enrolment of international students is just 0.1%. This may explain the

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higher values of the GER and EER in the US and UK as compared to countries like India. It will require more in-depth study to know the extent of the impact of the number of international students on the GER and EER values.

Relevance and Employability

Higher education cannot be viewed in isolation, because its relevance is one of the most important proximate determinants of employment. World Bank data for 2016 shows that the percentage of wage and salaried workers in developed countries is in the range of 85% to 90%, which is just 20.9% in India. Data collected in various rounds of NSSO and PLFS substantiates it. Higher education is reflected to a great extent in the inability of the degree holders to get a job. The NSSO and PLFS (2017–18) data shows that, while the overall unemployment among the population over 15 years was 6%, it was much higher among graduates (17.2%) and those qualified postgraduate and higher degrees (14.1%).¹

One of the objectives of the draft NEP 2019 is to increase the GER to at least 50% by 2035. For that to happen, enrolments need to be more than 6.8 crore, that is, more than double of the current enrolments. This is not possible without increasing the population eligible for entry into higher education. Also, the moot point is ensuring the absorption of this educated population in meaningful employment or empowering them to be self-employed. For this to happen, India will have to ensure a judicious balance between quantity and quality. The quality of teachers, innovative curricula, and contemporary pedagogical practices are the backbone of the quality of higher education, which must get policy priority. Any desperate attempt to increase GER in higher education without improving quality, relevance, and requisite skills might result in increased unemployment, social unrest and may not allow us to reap expected benefits of the demographic dividend.

Conclusions

We propose that, for India, EER would be the most appropriate indicator rather than mere GER for assessing the access,

quality, and relevance to higher education. The EER might be a refined measure to position developed and developing countries on the same plane and, therefore might portray a fairer picture about the enrolment in higher education. Moreover, in an era where lifelong learning facilitates continuously changing employment opportunities, it is high time to reconsider the current notion of an age-linked GER.

The future of learning is undoubtedly in blended pedagogy comprising face-to-face, distance, continuing, digital and online modes of delivery. One must not forget that quality online education not only needs technology but a robust curriculum and pedagogy to facilitate independent learning. However, online education need not be used as an easy tool merely to increase the GER. Such steps may be detrimental, unless the quality, relevance, skills, and employability issues are sufficiently addressed.

We should make efforts to improve the quality of school education as well as access and relevance to higher education to contribute towards national development and improve international competitiveness. We may need to deglamourise general education degrees and give social recognition/prestige and equal or even higher status to skill and vocational training. A renewed strategy of bridging blue and white-collared education may help enhance the employment opportunities in India and abroad. This will probably be a great tribute to the vision of a rapidly emerging young and aspiring new India.

NOTE

- 1 Unemployment Rate (UR) according to Usual Status (ps+ss) among 15+ Population

Year	Unemployment Rate in % among Persons with Higher Education Degrees		
	Graduates	Postgraduates and above	Total
2004–05	8.9	8.1	2.3
2011–12	7.6	7.5	2.1
2017–18	17.2	14.6	6.1

1 ps+ss: Principal Status and Subsidiary Status

2 Unemployment Rate is computed as:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of Unemployed Persons (Persons Looking for Job)}}{\text{Total Labour Force (Persons Working + Persons Looking for Job)}} \right) * 100$$

Source: National Sample Survey Office.

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Divergent Responses to the Forest Rights Act in Nagarahole

Disenchantment and Assertion

PRIYA GUPTA

The Adivasi communities of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, Karnataka have engaged with the implementation of the Forest Rights Act and have primarily responded in two divergent ways: disengagement from the FRA and claiming rights over ancestral lands as a mechanism of redressal and/or assertion. These two cases are examined against the background of a long history of evictions from the forests of Nagarahole and the infrastructural and sociopolitical conditions present inside and outside the settlements, including the presence of various non-governmental organisations. The FRA's success has been limited (and even negative), as its generic, centralised framing and implementation have been unable to fully take into account specific histories, socio-economic conditions, and political discourses, especially those of conservation advocates and Adivasi rights activists.

This paper is based on 13 months of fieldwork carried out during 2014–15 in NTR, Karnataka, as part of my doctoral thesis at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. I thank Rufford Foundation for funding my fieldwork in NTR. I am also grateful to all my respondents who took the time to interact with me. I also thank my advisor, Carol Upadhya, and my colleagues at NIAS, Krupa Rajangam and Savitha Suresh Babu, for reading and commenting on multiple drafts of this paper, and the anonymous referee for their constructive comments and suggestions on the earlier version of this paper. I also thank Anjan Katna for helping me prepare the map.

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It is becoming difficult [for me] to live here. My parents have become old living here in this pathetic condition. We will also become like them if we live here. Where is the guarantee that in future our children will fight for their rights and get them?

—Madesha, respondent

No one [would] go out of [the] forest [of] their own will. The Forest Department forcibly sent us out. [...] If they give [back] those lands where we used to cultivate earlier, we [will be] ready to go. [...] We have filed an application asking them to return our ancestral property. We are ready to go back there and take care of our land.

—Shetty, respondent

Shetty and Madesha,¹ Adivasis of Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (NTR), expressed completely contradictory views on what living within the forest entails. Madesha, who is a Jenu Kuruba, and Shetty, who is a Yerava, both live on the periphery of the reserve. However, as illustrated in the quotes above, their attitudes to living within the forest differ dramatically. While Madesha is keen to leave the forest due to the problems he and his family face inside it, Shetty wants to reclaim his lost land and move back into the forest. Their views were echoed by various Adivasis of NTR with whom I interacted during my fieldwork in 2014–15.

This paper explores the varied responses of Adivasis living in and around NTR to the prospect of living within the forest as offered under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, also known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA). The implementation of the FRA in NTR provides the background against which I explore their responses. I argue that while the FRA aims to address “historical injustices” done to the Adivasis by existing exclusionary forest laws, its implementation and effectiveness—and the choices available to particular Adivasi communities—are circumscribed by contextual conditions, such as their specific histories, and the socio-economic contexts and political discourses that prevail in a particular setting. In this case, “specific histories” refers to the eviction of Adivasis from NTR from the 1970s onwards due to wildlife conservation policies. “Socio-economic contexts” include infrastructural facilities available within and outside the forests as well as the presence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on Adivasi rights and conservation issues. By “political discourses,” I refer to a dominant set of ideas about Adivasi life that has framed the political struggles around forests in the region.

This paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out among diverse social actors as part of my doctoral research on conflicts between Adivasi rights discourses and forest conservation policies and practices. The intention of this research is not to simply compare the responses of different groups to the FRA and thereby identify the factors that determine its acceptance or rejection, but instead to provide a grounded and nuanced account of how Adivasis engage with the law and to historicise their relationship with the forest. This allows me to contribute to the ongoing debate on the FRA in India by highlighting the variability in Adivasis' views on it and the divergence in their own perceptions and responses.

The Forest Rights Act: Genesis and Implementation

The FRA, enacted in 2006, is a historic legislation that aims to redress the historical injustices inflicted on forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other traditional forest dwellers² by recognising their rights over forestlands. This injustice stems from exclusionary forest protection policies and laws that have held sway since the colonial period.

The FRA recognises two types of rights to land: individual and community. According to the act, the occupation of land of up to four acres for the purpose of habitation or cultivation prior to 13 December 2005 can be recognised as the individual rights of a family; meanwhile, the community rights provision recognises collective ownership and the collection, use, and disposal of minor forest produce³ traditionally collected. Another important provision, Section 3(2) of the FRA allows certain facilities, which are prohibited under forest and wild-life protection laws, to be established inside the forest for the welfare and development of the inhabitants. These include schools, dispensaries, shops, roads, electric lines, and drinking water. However, such facilities are provided based on the collective recommendations of the gram sabha,⁴ and not the requests of individual families.

As is well known, forest policies adopted by the colonial and postcolonial administrations in India dispossessed many Adivasi communities of their lands (Asher and Agarwal 2007). In many cases, Adivasis resisted such exclusion, leading to the formulation of region-specific policies, especially in areas with large Adivasi populations, to protect their land and provide them a certain level of authority and autonomy over their resources. Examples of such laws include the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908, the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act, 1949, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1964, and the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (Bijoy 2008; Upadhyaya 2005). However, while national-level forest protection policies have existed since the colonial period, a centralised, pan-Indian legislation to protect the rights of Adivasis was absent till the FRA was enacted in 2006.

The implementation of the FRA in different parts of India highlights its variable impact. In Chhattisgarh and Gujarat, for example, although not all rights were granted, Bandi (2015) argues that the FRA gave a "psychological boost" to the Adivasis by assuring them that their land would not be taken away. According to the Community Forest Rights—Learning and Advocacy (CFR—LA)

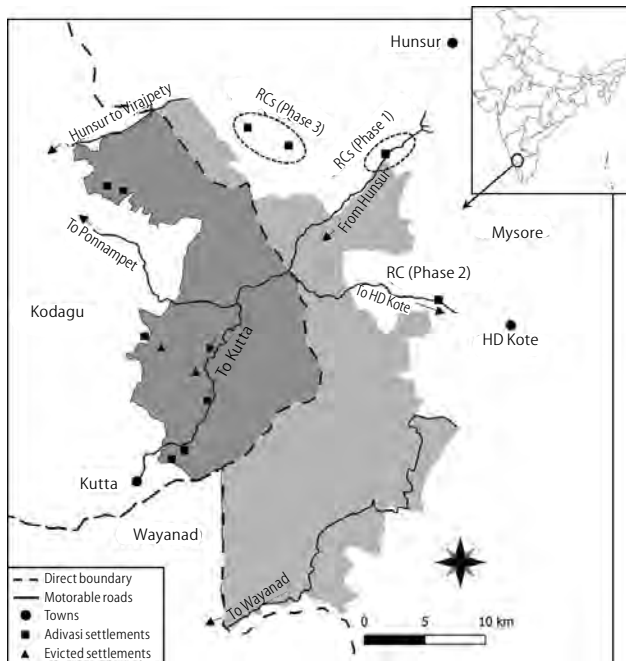
report (2016), in several regions, such as Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, Biligiri Rangaswami Temple Tiger Reserve, Karnataka, and Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh (MP), community rights were successfully established (CFR—LA 2016). The report also claims that local communities stopped commercial forestry in many areas where community forest rights were confirmed (CFR—LA 2016: 13). However, it also notes that, in many areas, forest departments have been more hostile towards granting community rights than individual rights (Agarwal 2018; CFR—LA 2016; Kumar et al 2017). According to the report, one reason for this is that forest departments believe that recognition of community rights will weaken their control over the forests (Agarwal 2018; Agrawal 2014; Kumar et al 2017; Sahu et al 2017; Springate-Baginski et al 2012). Thus, the forest departments have adopted various strategies to retain their control over forests, entangling and derailing the issue in several places in the process (CFR—LA 2016). Another concern raised by scholars about the sustenance of community resources is that the current generation of Adivasis is more interested in generating an income from the forest than protecting it. Hence, they often indulge in illegal extraction of forest resources, threatening the long-term survival of community forests—an argument put forward by forest department in Uttar Pradesh against the recognition of community rights (Agarwal 2018).

Field-level studies on the implementation of the FRA offer important insights into the successes and failures of the act in different regions and point to possible reasons for these varying outcomes. However, most studies do not provide an in-depth understanding of how local Adivasis, who are the subjects of the FRA, have responded to or engaged with the act. One exception is Ramanujam's (2017) study of the Baiga Chak region of MP, which shows that despite the impressive implementation of the FRA on paper, fractures have emerged on the ground. Here, many people are not interested in claiming community rights despite having received titles. He notes the various local conditions contributing to this response, such as degrading forest quality, which made people sceptical about their future inside the forest, and the gradual withdrawal of NGOs, which compromised their readiness for collective action. Additionally, some people depend on the timber-felling operations of the forest department of MP for their livelihoods, while others resent it since it destroys the place of their gods and ancestors' spirits and affects their sources of medicines, food, and fodder. Moreover, the younger generation aspires for an urban lifestyle rather than a life in the forest (Ramanujam 2017).

The range of local responses to the FRA provides insight into the gaps between policy formulation and implementation, suggesting that centralised policies and laws formulated at the national level may be incapable of accommodating local conditions and aspirations. In the next section, I discuss such specificities for the NTR.

Nagarahole Tiger Reserve: A History of Evictions

NTR (Figure 1, p 41) is spread across two districts of Karnataka—Kodagu and Mysore—but this paper is based on fieldwork carried out primarily in Kodagu. The Kutta–Hunsur road, which

Figure 1: Key Locations in and Around Nagarahole Tiger Reserve

This map was prepared using the data procured by the author during fieldwork.

runs south-west to north-east through NTR, traverses several different kinds of landscapes: teak plantations established before the 1970s; older forests; swampy grasslands, known locally as *hadlu*; settlements of Jenu Kurubas, Betta Kurubas and Yeravas, the three main Adivasi communities of NTR, all listed as STs in Karnataka; religious structures; and Karnataka Forest Department establishments.

Several Adivasi settlements continue to be situated inside NTR, although their presence has reduced drastically since the 1970s, when these forests came under a stricter wildlife conservation regime following the enactment of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Many Adivasis spoke about evictions that continued for more than a decade after 1972, resulting in the complete abandonment of some of their older settlements, such as Halehalli⁵ and Ajjapura, which were situated deep inside the forest and away from the main roads. These displaced communities were forced to shift, either to other settlements within the reserve and closer to the main roads, or to locales in the forest periphery (such as Hosahalli and Maradahalli). Some Adivasis moved to settlements that were entirely outside the forest, such as Kanakapura, or to the line houses maintained inside the coffee plantations for its workers.⁶

Most current settlements that still exist inside the forest are similar in appearance, with *kutch*a (thatched roof) houses; dirt roads; open wells, ponds, or streams as water sources; and solar lighting (mostly in poor condition). Social welfare facilities include Anganwadis (childcare centres), primary schools, and subsidised rations, supplied once a month. The northern part of the reserve is interspersed with fields and fallow lands, which mainly belong to Yerava families who continued to cultivate them despite the restrictions imposed in the 1970s. The fallow lands were earlier used for cultivation by the Adivasis, but due to increased crop damage by elephants over the past decade, many families stopped.

Prior to the 1970s, NTR forests were mainly used for extracting timber and raising plantations, and most Adivasis living inside them were employed by the Karnataka Forest Department as labourers. Although they often moved from one place to another inside the forest as plantation and timber extraction sites shifted, some places—such as Halehalli and Ajjapura—became steady habitation sites. In 1975, as the government expressed its intention to declare the area a national park, forest department officials used coercive means to evict families from NTR, on both the Kodagu and Mysore sides. Siddappa, a Jenu Kuruba and retired forest watcher, witnessed these evictions in many places inside NTR:

Yeravas and Kurubas were doing agriculture in Ajjapura and Halehalli. They were mostly growing rice, ragi and vegetables. [...] Once, when [the] crops were almost ready for harvest, Subbaiah [a forest officer] got elephants and left them to eat all the crops. They [the people who lived in Ajjapura and Halehalli] are staying in Kanakapura, on revenue land [outside NTR] now. They do not have land, but [have] constructed small houses and are living there now.

This coercive action of the forest department officials created a sense of fear among the Adivasis of NTR, and over the next three decades, many families were gradually forced to leave their homes and agricultural lands. Prior to the 1970s, most Adivasis used to cultivate paddy or practice *kumri*⁷ cultivation inside the forests. Many elders recollect this period as one of freedom and peace—during which they faced fewer restrictions on cultivation, forest produce collection, and mobility within forests—as opposed to the period after the 1970s, which brought severe restrictions and even evictions from their homes and lands. Also, due to the availability of labour work inside the forests, they were not pushed to seek work outside. After the evictions, many families became virtually landless as they came to occupy only small pieces of homestead lands. The memory of eviction highlights the kind of injustice that the Adivasis of NTR continue to face even today.

After the 1970s, the demand for labour inside NTR reduced severely due to the complete ban on all human activities in the forest. Consequently, Adivasis eventually became heavily dependent on coffee plantations and agricultural labour outside the forest, which significantly modified their earlier, everyday associations with the forest.

NGO Interventions in Nagarahole

During the 1980s, the evictions led to the establishment of several Adivasi rights NGOs in the region. Over the past three decades, these groups have engaged with Adivasis to promote their welfare and rights by negotiating with government agencies to secure agricultural land for some evicted families living outside the forest; providing educational and nutritional support to Adivasi children; facilitating the establishment of Adivasi-led organisations and collaborating with these organisations in filing court cases against the forest department; organising protests to demand rights and welfare for Adivasis; and conducting awareness programmes on women empowerment, indigenous knowledge, and traditional Adivasi practices. Many Adivasis are also employed by these NGOs.

The NGOs organise events that celebrate the traditional practices and lives of the Adivasis, as I witnessed in an event for displaying the Adivasis' forest produce, crops, and handicraft items; they also worshipped their deities in a small ceremony. Several Adivasis attended the event, as did local political leaders, retired forest officers, mediapersons, and members of other Adivasi rights NGOs who shared a mutually cooperative relationship.

In addition, some of these NGOs have aligned themselves with national and global indigenous rights movements, and their members often participate in events organised by these larger rights networks within and outside India. Local Adivasi organisations created by these NGOs are also entrenched in these networks. A leader of one such organisation showed me his passport with visa stamps from various European countries as well as the United States. He mentioned that he had attended several indigenous rights conferences held outside India, where he had also received, on occasion, the opportunity to speak. Thus, these NGOs not only use the Adivasis' experience of evictions and their hardships and traditional knowledge to create a discourse around Adivasi rights, self-rule, and autonomy, they also connect it to discourses circulating within national and global indigenous rights movements. Since the enactment of the FRA, their advocacy for claims to ancestral lands under the banner of self-rule has received a further impetus.

Since the 1990s, a few other NGOs that advocate for forests and wildlife conservation—besides those working on Adivasi rights—have emerged. Their agenda of conserving wildlife and forests by creating inviolate forest areas has led them to support and actively participate in shifting Adivasis outside the forest. Hence, Adivasi rights NGOs and conservation NGOs have clashed on many issues. While Adivasi rights NGOs blame conservation NGOs for forcing people out of the forest, conservation NGOs argue that Adivasi rights NGOs encourage activities prohibited in the forest, such as collecting forest produce and cutting timber, and also inhibit the development of Adivasi communities by keeping them inside the forests. In turn, Adivasi rights NGOs blame conservation NGOs for co-opting a few prominent Adivasi leaders of NTR by offering them cash incentives and jobs on the condition that they subscribe to a government-sponsored compensatory relocation scheme.⁸

The activities and discourses of these voluntary organisations have shaped the responses of the Adivasis to the FRA in different ways. In this context, it is often difficult to disentangle the views and decisions of the people from those of the NGOs. Other conditions, such as the availability of facilities outside the forest, also shape their aspirations and generate varied responses, which I illustrate in the following section.

Disengagement versus Assertion of Rights

In my attempt to trace the various ways in which the Adivasi communities of NTR have engaged with the FRA, I identified two main responses: first, a clear disengagement with the FRA due to a disenchantment with life inside the forest; second, laying claim to the ancestral lands inside NTR through the FRA.

At the time of my fieldwork in 2014–15, most Adivasi families of NTR were granted individual rights, but community rights had not yet been granted in the Kodagu part of the reserve. Although I discuss responses to the FRA through the voices of only a few interlocutors, their narratives represent a broader pattern. However, individual responses also vary among and within different families.

Case 1: Disenchantment with Life in the Forests

We got [individual] rights [...] But the problem here is that we cannot build houses without a road. ITDP [Integrated Tribal Development Programme⁹] sanctioned five lakhs for the road. But it was taken back because this is a national park and roads cannot be built here.

— Madesha

Madesha, a Jenu Kuruba Adivasi leader from Lingapura, had previously been very active in the fight for Adivasi rights in NTR, but he later disengaged from the struggle for Adivasi existence inside the forest. The trajectory of his changing stance illustrates the dilemmas faced by the Adivasis amidst the various forces attempting to reshape their lives. During my fieldwork, many people suggested that I speak to Madesha as he was considered a leader. I first met him during a meeting organised inside NTR with panchayat members and forest officials to address the poor implementation of the FRA. At this meeting, attended by nearly 100 people from different settlements situated inside and outside NTR, leaders from each settlement spoke about the issues that they were facing. Madesha, speaking on behalf of his settlement, came across as a fearless leader who did not hesitate to criticise the forest department in the presence of forest officials. He blamed the latter for hindering the implementation of the FRA.

When I interviewed him four months later, his stance was very different. During that interval, Madesha had decided to move outside the forest, availing the forest department's rehabilitation programme. His decision came as a surprise to me, not only because he had been referred to as someone who led the fight for Adivasi rights, but also because none of the other Adivasis of his settlement had mentioned this shift. In fact, it turned out that Madesha had not told anyone about his decision since the region has been fraught with conflicts and hostility between those opting for the rehabilitation programme and those who wanted to stay inside the forest. He also feared allegations that he had taken a "commission" (bribe) from the forest department to persuade other families to move out, so he decided neither to tell anyone nor to help others move out. Madesha's primary concern in taking this decision was to look after the welfare of his family, which included his elderly parents, wife, and two children.

Another main concern was the lack of facilities inside the forest, which had not improved despite the (supposed) implementation of the FRA. Most Adivasis living inside the forest complained about the lack of amenities—no access to electricity, safe drinking water, good housing, road networks, and so on. As Madesha's narrative—which I have quoted at the beginning of this paper—indicates, his frustrations with life inside the forest arose not only from its lack of facilities, but also from his

parents' past struggles for survival under the restricted living conditions inside the forest. He and his parents had lost patience waiting for a better future inside the forest, given that they had the option to move outside where there are more opportunities for a better and more secure life. Although Madesha had received individual land rights, he was unable to improve common facilities (roads, water supply, electricity, or proximity to schools) because infrastructure can only be provided by the government at the community level on the gram sabha's recommendation. Thus, the overall well-being of individual families is contingent upon community resources and infrastructure, which are difficult to obtain due to the forest department's concerns over providing these facilities inside an "inviolable" tiger reserve. This made Madesha and many others disenchanted with the possibilities offered by the FRA, despite their initial optimism.

Besides the lack of facilities, another reason often cited for Adivasis leaving the forest and disengaging with the FRA was conflicts with wildlife. For Adivasis living in the northern part of NTR, this was a major concern. Lakshmi, a Jenu Kuruba, lives in the northern part of NTR. Hers was one of the fields damaged by elephants a few years back, leading her to stop cultivation. She mentioned that crop and property damage had increased over the years due to strict forest conservation policies, which has led to an increase in the animal population inside NTR. Conflicts with elephants were so severe in some settlements in other parts of NTR that people slept in tree huts. Their houses and temples were severely damaged, and despite receiving individual land titles under the FRA, they were unwilling to stay inside the forest. The success of strict conservation policies in NTR made the FRA insignificant or irrelevant for these people, and they began seeking better options outside. Thus, the FRA, which was enacted as a counter to the dominant state-led conservation model, was now being undermined by the consequences of the same model.

The above case highlights a few conditions that have made some Adivasis disengage with the FRA and seek better lives outside. Their ideas about life in rehabilitation colonies have been confirmed by relatives and others living there who believe that their lives have improved due to access to better and increased facilities. Moreover, they are happier living away from the restrictive forest department regime.

In addition to their personal experiences of living inside the forest, the Adivasis' decision to leave the forest was also influenced by conservation NGOs, who offered them incentives to move out. However, there are others who continue to stay inside the forest, and still others who live outside and have recently begun to claim rights over the ancestral lands from which they were evicted. Next, I turn to these cases and discuss the strategies that they have adopted to assert their rights.

Case 2: Claiming Ancestral Lands

In the 1970s, everyone had land and paddy fields over here. Many people were shifted out. So we are asking [them] to give land [to] those who are staying here. That's why we are not shifting out.

— Sundar

Sundar, a Betta Kuruba over 60 years old, lives in Maradahalli settlement inside the forest. Along with several other families, he moved here from his earlier settlement deeper inside the forest during the evictions around the mid-1970s. He and many others have refused to shift to rehabilitation colonies, where they have been offered agricultural land and housing. Instead, they are claiming their rights to redress the injustices done to them over the past four decades.

Chandra, a Jenu Kuruba, is an Adivasi leader who lives inside the forest in the Hosahalli settlement. In articulating his claim to his ancestral land, he talked not only about righting previous injustices but also of eliminating any future possibility of harassment by the forest department—something he has experienced intimately. Over the past decade, the forest department has filed several cases against him over illegal timber cutting and collection of forest produce. The forest department has often filed forest-offence cases—especially against Adivasi leaders—as a tactic to coerce people to leave the forest. On more than one occasion during my fieldwork, I met Chandra as he was going to a court hearing in a nearby town. These ongoing cases, however, have not dissuaded him from presenting himself as an Adivasi leader claiming rights, nor has it induced him to shift outside the forest. On the contrary, he proudly stated that his resolve has strengthened as the number of cases filed against him has increased.

While Chandra continues to live inside the forest and resist the threats of the forest department, Shetty, who lives in Kanakapura just outside the boundary of NTR, remembers the old days and wishes to relive and revive them through the FRA. He remarks on their heavy dependence on coffee plantation labour since the 1970s:

We need to manage our lives from those earnings [wage labour in coffee plantations]. There [inside forest] we had our own land. We used to grow our own food. We used to grow food organically without using any [chemical] fertilisers like we are getting here.

This shows that his desire to reclaim land inside the forest is not just to assert legal rights or correct historical wrongs, but also to revive an earlier way of life—when their dependence on the government or market for food and healthcare was limited. They perceive those days to have been more carefree. They believe that living inside the forest will assure them a relatively self-sufficient and independent life, which is not possible outside the forest. This view is based on their past four decades of post-eviction experiences. As I mentioned above, such narratives about organic and chemical-free cultivation appear to stem not only from their memories and experiences but also from the discourses circulated by Adivasi rights groups, who talk about the "natural life" and "environment-friendly" practices of the Adivasis. Drawing from international discourses on indigenous communities, these NGOs also claim that Adivasis are the rightful and true custodians of nature. In this context, one cannot read the respondents' narratives in a straightforward way, as they are clearly inflected by dominant ideas about pristine nature and the superiority of Adivasis' traditional practices. However, this does not make their claims

less authentic. As other scholars have noted, given the influence of indigenous people's movements around the world, Adivasi claims to the forest are often made most effectively through the language of indigenous knowledge, "traditional" environment-friendly practices, and their symbiotic relationship with the forests (Ghosh 2006).

Sundar, Chandra, Shetty, and others, who are claiming their rights over ancestral lands, share common apprehensions about leaving the forest and living outside:

We know this land, its trees, its food, its water, and its animals. Our ancestors were here, our gods are here. This is the only way of life we know. We can never go hungry in the forest. Many people who shifted to the rehabilitation colonies outside have fallen sick within a few months of shifting out.

They associate a sense of uncertainty and unfamiliarity with the world and life outside the forests and remain sceptical about promises of a "better future" made by the forest department and conservation NGOs to convince them to shift to the rehabilitation colonies.

Furthermore, the experience of being evicted from their ancestral lands has produced a sense of betrayal in relation to the forest department. Sundar showed me a teak plantation behind his settlement and mentioned that they had planted and protected those trees. During the colonial and postcolonial periods, the forest department raised teak plantations in NTR to grow valuable timber for sale. Adivasis were used as labourers in these plantations and were allowed to practice kumri cultivation, growing ragi alongside teak. This ensured that the Adivasis protected not only their crops but also the plantations. This practice was followed across NTR, and many Adivasis have used this history to question evictions carried out to "protect" the forest, given that it was they who historically protected and raised the forest. For Sundar and others, their claims to ancestral lands, made through the FRA, are also directed at reclaiming their position as the rightful custodians and true owners of the forest.

In this context, several Adivasis of settlements inside NTR have adopted another strategy to claim their rights—that of refusing to accept individual titles granted to them till their community rights are also recognised. I discuss below how this strategy is deeply entangled with claims to ancestral lands.

Refusal to Accept Rights Granted

Under the FRA, families living inside the forest can apply for individual as well as community rights to the forests that they have used before 13 December 2005. Accordingly, families living in Maradahalli and Hosahalli applied for both kinds of rights, community and individual. While the status of their community rights was unclear at the time of my fieldwork, most families were granted individual titles. As mentioned above, evicted families had lost their cultivation lands and came to occupy only a few cents¹⁰ (ranging from 2 to 70 as per the records of the tribal welfare department in Kodagu) of homestead land. I found that many families were not aware of the specificities under each category of rights granted under the FRA. They believed that through the FRA, they could get

both housing and cultivation rights over their ancestral lands inside the forest. Since individual claims were filed only for the land that was currently occupied inside the forest, most people received individual rights only over their few cents of homestead land, which they occupied after getting evicted from their earlier settlements. However, they were demanding rights over ancestral lands within the forest as well. The delay in granting community rights was widely perceived as a denial of their rights. In response, several Adivasis refused to accept their individual land titles, since they believed that these did not represent rights to their ancestral lands. As Prakash, a Jenu Kuruba, said:

They have given [us] rights only for the house. But we are asking them for two to three acres of land along with the permission to build a house where our parents used to do agriculture before. (Prakash)

Thus, the history of evictions from NTR has also shaped the contemporary demand for land rights. Because of this history of unjust evictions, many families adopted the strategy of refusing to collect individual rights papers for only the homestead land. Thus, we see here that the Adivasis do not see individual and community rights as different categories as defined under the FRA. Rather, the separate categories make little sense to Adivasis in the context of their historical dwelling in and use of the forest and the recent history of evictions.

While a certain lack of clarity and miscommunication regarding the act existed among the people, those who refused to accept individual rights were not necessarily victims of this incomplete understanding, but were also influenced by their own past experiences and injustices as well as by Adivasi rights NGOs. Such a sentiment was consistent with the rhetoric of self-rule and autonomy derived from international discourses around indigenous communities, a domain familiar to these NGOs.

Conclusions

One of the primary reasons for these divergent responses was the strong influence of both conservation advocates and Adivasi rights activists, who have shaped Adivasi politics according to their own agendas. This has divided local Adivasis into two broad camps. The languages of "our land" and "we are its protectors" as well as "we want to live like others" were used to assert their position either for claiming rights over ancestral lands or their desire to move out of the forest. These different responses did not fall into a neat pattern in terms of locality or community. Rather, they varied within particular settlements, groups, and families.

This paper demonstrates that the capacity of the FRA to meet its objectives depends upon specific histories, the socio-economic infrastructure, and political discourses in a particular location. The cases presented in this paper demonstrate the different ways in which the Adivasis of NTR engage or disengage with the FRA, or, at times, utilise it in ways not envisioned in the policy. By highlighting the plurality of responses to the FRA, I have tried to indicate how different kinds of rights

claims have emerged in one region—some intended by the policy, others unintended. Local conditions, including the history of evictions, uneven access to facilities inside and outside the forests, the presence of NGOs, and the varying aspirations of Adivasis themselves, influence how the FRA is received or invoked. Also, local perceptions of rights and well-being are drawn not only from personal and community experiences of neglect and eviction, but also from entrenched international discourses around indigenous rights.

This paper also demonstrates that the Adivasis do not perceive the various provisions of the FRA—individual rights, community rights, and the provisioning of facilities—as distinct options or different kinds of rights. Instead, the choices for their own futures and well-being, available to them within specific locales, depend on access to all of these provisions, which have not been forthcoming. Recognition of only one of

the rights neither ensures their well-being nor redresses the past injustices done to these communities.

Thus, the varying responses of local communities suggest that the procedures and modalities through which the FRA becomes available to people are not adequate to meet the goals of this policy—either in redressing historical wrongs or ensuring their well-being inside the forests. This conclusion points to a larger concern, which is that policies that promote decentralised, participatory, and inclusive governance continue to operate within a centralised framework based on presuppositions that are made on behalf of people, and not with or by them. It also suggests the reproduction of the long-standing authoritarian conservation regime. I suggest that the FRA is still dawdling, in terms of day-to-day governance and implementation, on the path to achieving its goal of ensuring participatory and democratic forest governance.

NOTES

- 1 I have used pseudonyms for all persons and settlements to protect their identities and maintain the confidentiality of my respondents. In accordance with my research ethics protocol, I have not provided the exact locations or population sizes of each settlement, since they are features that make the settlements easily identifiable. However, I have retained actual place names, such as Nagarahole, Kodagu, and Mysore, to provide context to the discussion.
- 2 The FRA is officially known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. In this paper, I use the term “Adivasi” to refer to communities specified as Scheduled Tribes under Article 342 of the Constitution. The “other traditional forest dwellers” are communities other than Scheduled Tribes, who are defined in the FRA as those who have primarily resided in forests for at least three generations prior to 13 December 2005, and who depend on forests for their bona fide livelihood needs.
- 3 The FRA defines minor forest produce as “all non-timber forest produce of plant origin including bamboo, brush wood, stumps, cane, tussar, cocoons, honey, wax, lac, tendu or kendu leaves, medicinal plants and herbs, roots, tubers and the like” (Section 2[i]).
- 4 As per the Section 2(g) of the FRA, a “gram sabha” is a village assembly that consists of all adult members of a village. Gram panchayats have to convene these gram sabhas at the level of a hamlet or group of hamlets or habitations as per Rules 2A and 3 of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Amendment Rules, 2012.
- 5 Halehalli and Ajjapura were old settlements situated in the western part of the reserve, which were completely evicted. Hosahalli and Maradahalli were situated inside the forest, near the main road, while Lingapura and Kanakapura were situated on the periphery of the reserve, with the latter being situated outside the forest. The settlements situated in the northern part of the reserve consisted of both Yerava and Jenu Kuruba families. Hosahalli, Maradahalli, and Lingapura consisted of both Jenu and Betta Kuruba families, while Kanakapura consisted of Yerava, Jenu Kuruba, and non-Adivasi families. Apart from Kanakapura, which was established mainly by the evicted

families, the eviction pattern was similar across all the settlements mentioned in this paper, that is, these settlements consisted of families who had lived there before the evictions started as well as families who had got evicted from different parts of NTR. I discuss some aspects that were specific to particular settlements, such as elephant problems in the northern part of Nagarahole.

- 6 Many coffee estate owners in Kodagu employ Adivasis as full-time labourers and provide housing for them within the plantations. Although I was told that many families had shifted from the forest to such housing, people did not know the exact plantations to which they had moved; hence, I could not contact any such evictees.
- 7 *Kumri* is a modified form of shifting cultivation that began during the colonial period in the forests of Kodagu. In *kumri*, teak saplings were grown in the gaps between ragi crops cultivated by the Adivasis inside the forests.
- 8 The Karnataka Forest Department started the government-sponsored compensatory relocation scheme in 1998–99. A total of 616 Adivasi families from NTR were shifted to nine rehabilitation colonies built in Mysore district close to the boundary of NTR. These families were given cement houses, agricultural land, cash, and other facilities, such as piped water supply, community centres, and proximity to healthcare centres, schools, and markets.
- 9 The Integrated Tribal Development Programme is run by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs; it provides each state funds for implementing schemes and programmes for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes.
- 10 1 cent = 0.01 acre = approximately 435.60 square feet.

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Impact of the Negative Interest Rate Policy on Emerging Asian Markets

An Empirical Investigation

ABHISHEK ANAND, LEKHA CHAKRABORTY

In the last few years, several central banks have implemented negative interest rate policies to boost the domestic economy. However, such policies may have some unintended consequences for the emerging Asian markets. The analysis provides an assessment of the domestic and global implications of negative interest rate policy and how it differs from that of quantitative easing. It shows that the impact of NIRP is heterogeneous, with differential impacts for big Asian economies (India and Indonesia) and small trade-dependent economies (Hong Kong, Philippines, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand). Quantitative easing, on the other hand, has no significant impact on inflation but nominal GDP growth declines in EAMS. The currency appreciates and exports decline. The impact is much more severe in big emerging economies.

Post the global financial crisis of 2008, the way the monetary policies were conducted in the advanced economies changed dramatically. These policies have generally been termed as “unconventional” monetary policy (UMP) as opposed to “conventional” monetary policies where the central banks either cut or raise policy rates to influence short-term interest rates. However, the central banks of many of the advanced economies had to look beyond conventional monetary policies after it reached the zero lower bound (ZLB) in order to help their economies come out of deflationary pressures.

The experience so far suggests that the central banks have resorted to two different ways of conducting UMP—quantitative easing (QE) and negative interest rate policy (NIRP). The QE was aimed at suppressing the long-term interest rates by the large-scale purchases of long-term government bonds and mortgage backed securities by central banks. The Federal Reserve (Fed), the Bank of England (BoE), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Bank of Japan (BoJ) actively engaged in QE in various phases.

Since mid-2014, an increasing number of central banks have implemented UMP by resorting to NIRP. Six central banks—Danmarks Nationalbank (DN), ECB, Sveriges Riksbank (SR), the Swiss National Bank (SNB), BoJ and, most recently, the Hungarian National Bank (MNB)—decided to move their policy rates below zero, traditionally seen as the lower bound for nominal interest rates. Even the Fed had indicated that NIRP remains a possible tool at its disposal if required (Smialek 2016).

The UMP may have certain unintended consequences for emerging Asian markets (EAMS), given that the global linkage of EAMS with rest of the world has increased in the last decade. Specifically, the EAMS worry that ultra-easy monetary policy in advanced economies has led to huge capital inflows and currency appreciation, making them less competitive in the trade market. There exists an abundance of literature analysing the spillover impact of QE on emerging markets (EMs). Unfortunately, the same is not true for NIRP, and the literature availability is scant. Central banks of many EMs have raised concerns over adverse spillover effects of NIRP. Also, the way spillover effects of NIRP are transmitted to EAMS may be different from QE.

The aim of this paper is to fill this gap by attempting to quantify the possible spillover impact of NIRP on EAMS. Although six central banks have adopted NIRP so far, except for Japan and eurozone, no other country is systematically important for emerging Asia. As far as Japan and eurozone are concerned,

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there are two limitations—first, the available data set is not sufficient to arrive at any conclusion, and second, the BOJ and ECB actively pursued together QE as well as NIRP, making it difficult to disentangle the impact of NIRP.

To get rid of the data problem, we try to answer the following: What if the United States (US), globally the most important country for emerging Asia, adopted NIRP after reaching the ZLB in 2008 instead of QE? We analyse the possible spillover impact on EMS, had the Fed cut the fund rate to negative territory after hitting the ZLB. We compare the possible domestic impact of NIRP and QE on the US economy. We also study and compare the spillover impact of both the policies on EAMS.

For our study, we use macroeconomic data of the US and EAMS from 1997 onwards and divide it into two sub-periods—pre-crisis (up to December 2008) and post-crisis (January 2009 onwards). Since the Fed exclusively used the federal fund rate to support growth and control inflation in the pre-crisis period, this sample is used to study and quantify the domestic and spillover impact of NIRP. The post-crisis period sample is used to study the impact of QE. The federal fund target rate remained constant after reaching the ZLB and it was raised as late as in December 2015. Thus, separately studying the pre-crisis and post-crisis samples makes it easier to disentangle the impact of NIRP from QE. We use the 10-year US government bond yield (G-sec) as a proxy for QE. Changes in the US 10-year sovereign bond yield is said to be a good indicator of QE, when the ZLB on nominal interest rates becomes binding, and when the major objective of Fed asset purchase programmes has been to reduce long-term bond yields (Chen et al 2011). Similarly, we use the US three-month treasury bill (T-bill) as an indicator for NIRP. The inspiration for using T-bill for our analysis comes from the experience so far suggesting that modest negative policy rates are transmitted to money market rates and short-term maturity government bonds in very much the same way as positive rates are (Bech et al 2016). Hence, an impulse response function for a negative shock in T-bill helps us identify the possible impact of negative rates on the economies of the US as well as the EAMS.

We use data for Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand to study the spillover impact of NIRP on EAMS. However, we understand that the impact of NIRP on different EAMS may be heterogeneous. To check if different set of countries are affected differently, we study the spillover impact of NIRP and QE on big Asian economies (India and Indonesia) and small trade-dependent economies (STDE), that is, separately Hong Kong, Philippines, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand. We present impulse response functions (IRF) of the US macroeconomic variables when a negative shock is given to G-sec and T-bill. Next, we use panel IRF to study the spillover impact of QE and NIRP on EAMS, big Asian economies and STDE. We present IRF of key macroeconomic variables for the given set of countries when a negative shock is given to G-sec and T-bill.

Literature Review

While the domestic and spillover impact of QE has been studied extensively, the analysis of the domestic as well as spillover effects of NIRP from advanced economies to emerging markets

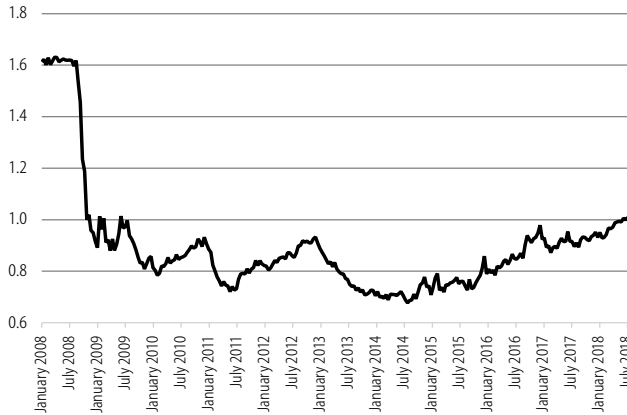
has not received much attention in the empirical literature. The reason for the paucity literature is understandable given the rather limited experience central banks have with NIRP.

Much of the work to study the domestic and international spillover impact of QE has resorted to event studies analysing the announcement or surprise effects of QE. Lately, many studies have also employed a regression analysis. Relying on event studies of US asset purchases on domestic and international financial markets, Neely (2010) employed the event studies method and found that the US QE reduced treasury bond yields by 100 basis points (bps) and corporate bond yields by 80 bps. He also found that the US QE led to lowering of bond rates in the other advanced economies by 20–80 bps and the dollar depreciated by 4–11 percentage points. Glick and Leduc (2011) showed that, despite the fall in long-term interest rates and the depreciation of the dollar, commodity prices fell on average on days of QE announcements, and the effects were more pronounced during the first round of QE.

Chen et al (2011) employed the global VECM technique in their study and found that, compared to its domestic impact, the US QE turned out to have a far greater impact on most emerging economies. In emerging Asia, the inflation increase ranges from 0.5 in Singapore to almost 4 percentage points in Indonesia, while the US inflation rises at most by 0.6 percentage points. Bhattarai et al (2015), using the Bayesian vector autoregression technique, found that an expansionary US QE shock leads to an exchange rate appreciation, a reduction in long-term bond yields, and a stock market boom for emerging market countries. Fratzscher et al (2013) study the global spillovers of the Fed's UMP measures and find that it affected capital flows to emerging market economies in a procyclical manner, raised asset prices globally and weakened the dollar. Lim et al (2014) study the effects of the US QE on gross financial inflows to developing countries and conclude that QE have been transmitted internationally through liquidity, portfolio rebalancing, and confidence channels.

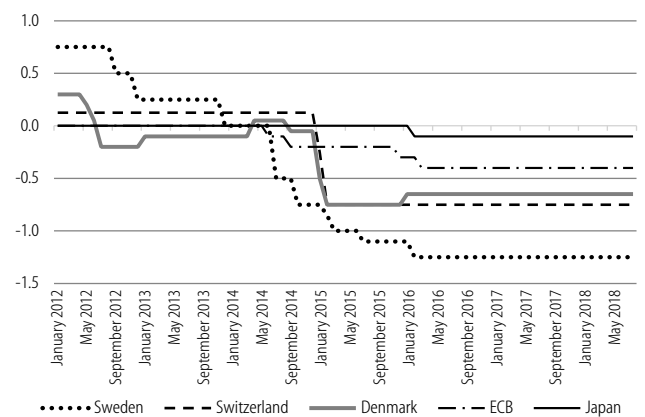
As NIRP is considered, the most recent work has focused on its domestic effects, analysing several channels of domestic transmission. There is very little research on the international spillovers of central bank balance sheet policies, especially the impact on emerging Asia. Data availability is the main obstacle as the period following the implementation of NIRP remains very short and the effects are yet to be fully transmitted to other countries. The Financial Stability Report published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI 2016) concludes that the impact of NIRP on rising inflation/inflation expectations are more benign compared to asset price inflation and wealth effects. Roach (2016) contends that NIRP transmission through wealth effects from asset markets rather than through the borrowing costs has an impact on the cost of credit. Arteta et al (2016) argue that since the introduction of NIRP, both inflation projections and expectations have continued to decline. The downgrades in inflation projections reflected to a large extent the impact of sharply declining oil and other commodity prices since mid-2014. However, long-term inflation expectations have also showed signs of a downward drift. They also use the event

Figure 1: M1 Money Multiplier—US



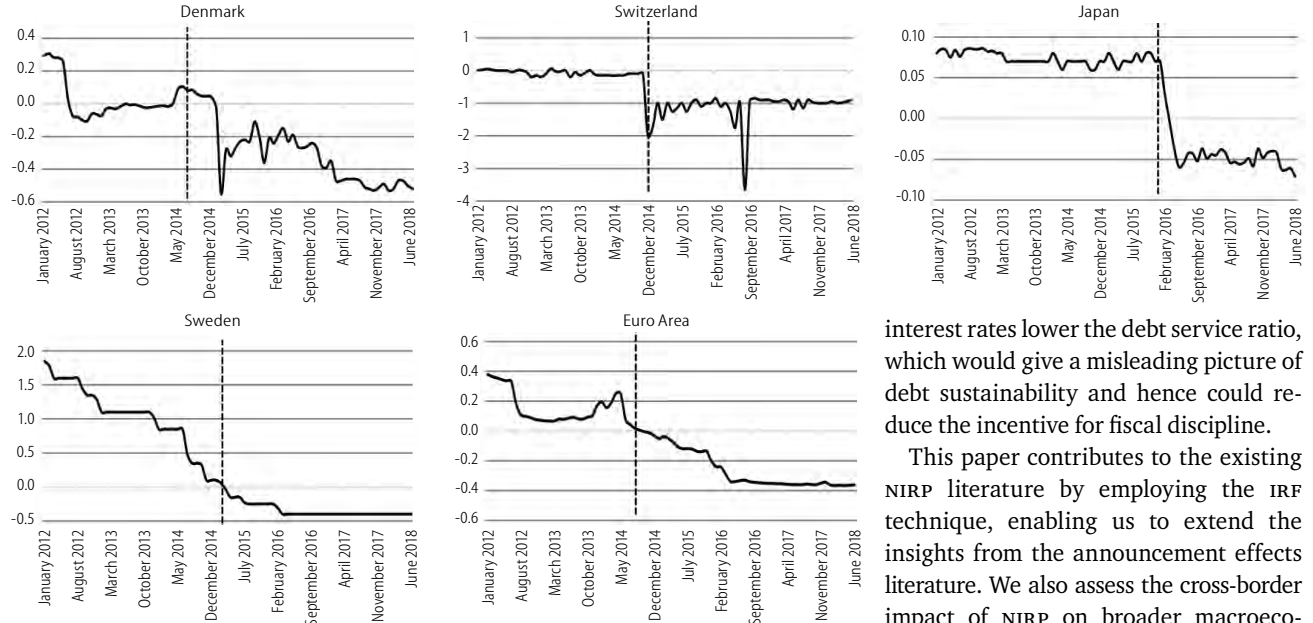
Source: Federal Reserve.

Figure 2: Interest Rate (%) on Reserves with the Central Bank



Source: Central Banks of respective countries.

Figure 3: Transmission of NIRP to Money Market Overnight Call Money Rate



The vertical line depicts the time of adoption of NIRP.
Sources: ECB, SR, DN, SNB, BoJ.

study technique and conclude that currencies appreciated, bond spreads declined, and equity prices increased for EMS on the day of the announcement of NIRP. Genay and Podjasek (2014) find that a low interest rate environment is associated with decreased profitability for banks, but they estimate the effect to be economically small and outweighed by other macroeconomic factors. Lipton (2016) argues that NIRP is also likely to push capital either out of the economy, leading to currency depreciation pushing exports and reducing imports, akin to competitive devaluations, or it could inflate certain asset prices like housing, necessitating the use of macro-prudential measures. Coeuré (2014) raises concerns that banks may choose to borrow less from the central bank in order to lower excess reserves and avoid the negative deposit rate. This would put an upward pressure on rates in the interbank and bond market, offsetting the stimulative impact of the NIRP. Hannoun (2015) is of the view that NIRP would reduce the incentive for fiscal consolidation and structural reform in cases where it is needed. Negative

interest rates lower the debt service ratio, which would give a misleading picture of debt sustainability and hence could reduce the incentive for fiscal discipline.

This paper contributes to the existing NIRP literature by employing the IRF technique, enabling us to extend the insights from the announcement effects literature. We also assess the cross-border impact of NIRP on broader macroeconomic and financial variables that policy, such as output and exchange rate, on emerging Asia. Finally, we do a comparative analysis of QE and NIRP with respect to their domestic as well as spillover impacts on macroeconomic and financial variables.

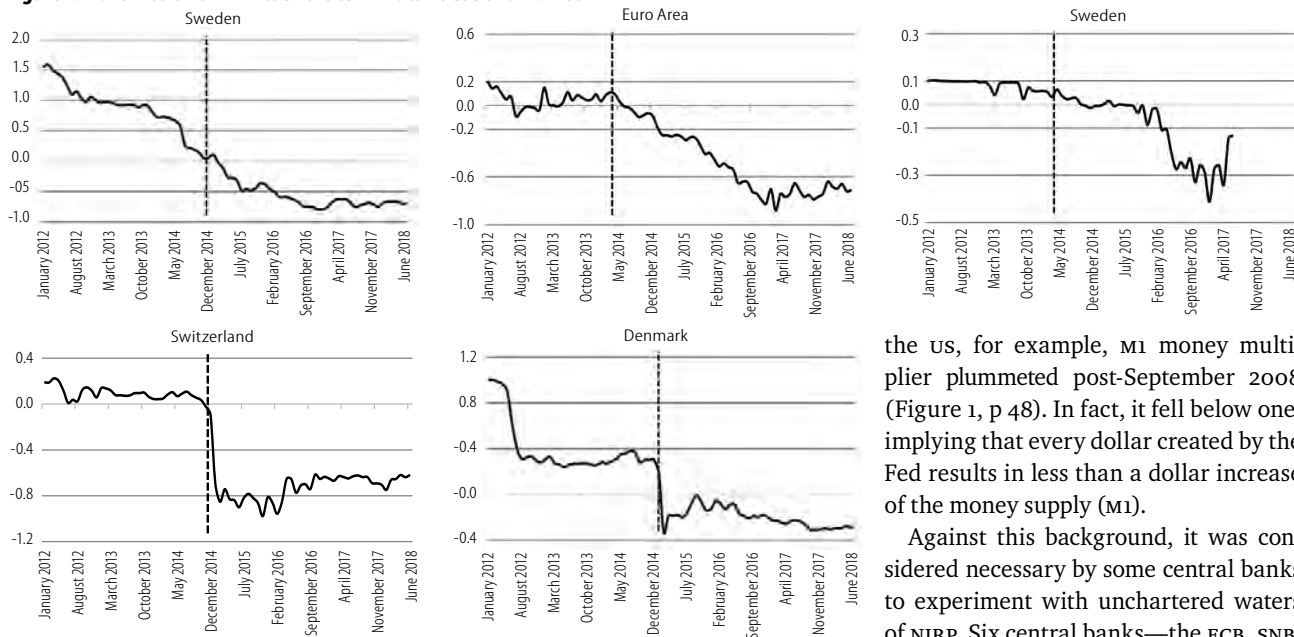
Implementation of NIRP

The experience of NIRP so far, since its implementation by five central banks, is elucidated here. We are excluding the Hungary National Bank from our analysis as its decision to implement NIRP is very recent, and not enough data points are available to arrive at a meaningful conclusion.

An assessment of NIRP and its transmission: Many of the central banks in the advanced economies cut their policy rates close to zero in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 to help reinvigorate the flagging economy. Once the policy rates hit the zLB, further monetary easing was achieved through unconventional measures, such as forward guidance and QE. Despite all these efforts, the economic recovery in advanced

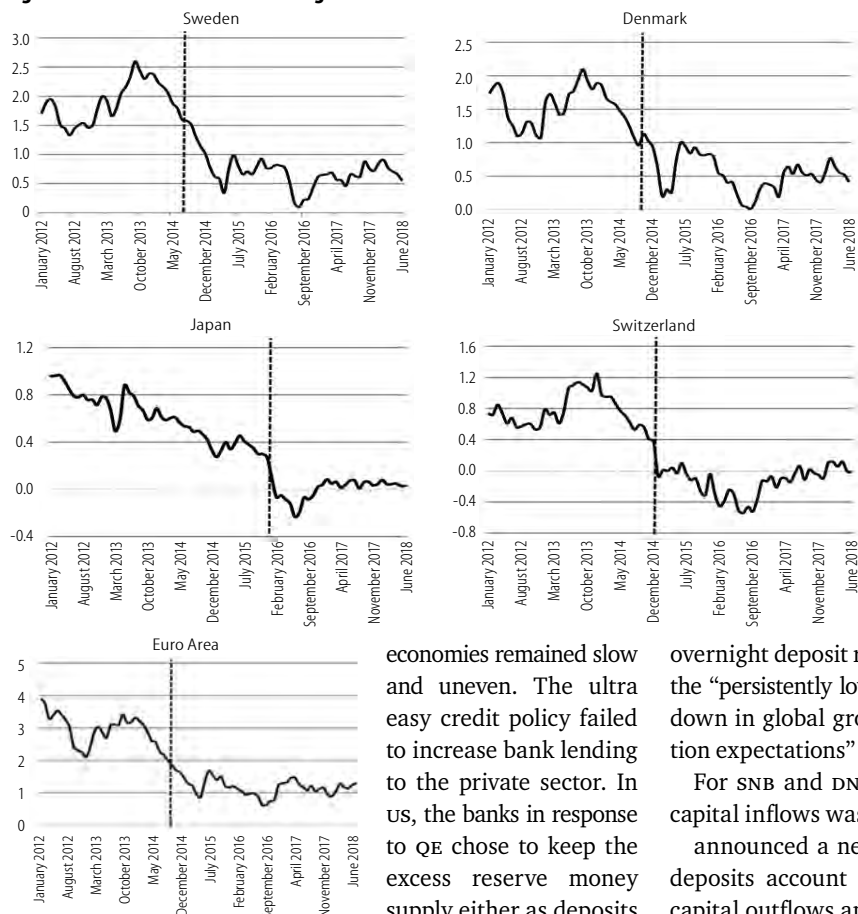
ECONOMIC & POLITICAL WEEKLY

Figure 4: Transmission of NIRP to Short-term Maturities Bond Market



Three months t-bill yield for Japan, Denmark and Sweden; one-year security yield for euro area and Switzerland.
Sources: ECB, SR, SNB, DN, BoJ.

Figure 5: Transmission of NIRP to Long-term Maturities Bond Market



Figures are for 10-year government bonds yield.
The vertical line depicts the time of adoption of NIRP.
Sources: ECB, SR, SNB, BoJ, DN.

As a result, even in response to a quantum leap in reserve money, the money supply never really picked up in the us.

In the us, for example, M1 money multiplier plummeted post-September 2008 (Figure 1, p 48). In fact, it fell below one, implying that every dollar created by the Fed results in less than a dollar increase of the money supply (M1).

Against this background, it was considered necessary by some central banks to experiment with uncharted waters of NIRP. Six central banks—the ECB, SNB, DN, SR, BoJ and HNB—have pushed their key policy rates (mainly the deposit rates on excess reserves) in negative territory since mid-2014 (Figure 2, p 48).

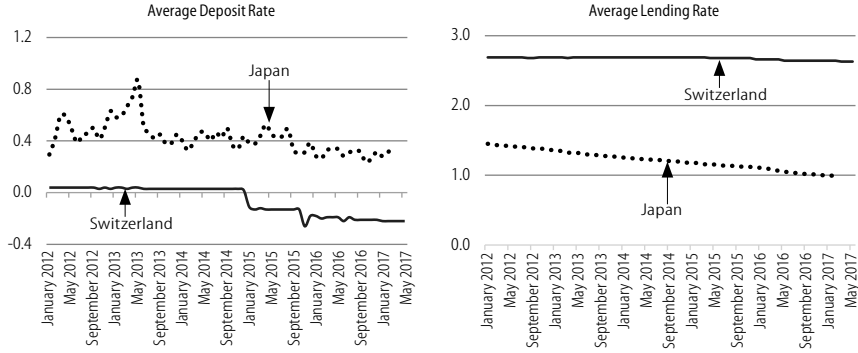
The main motivations for these central banks for the adoption of NIRP vary. For the ECB, BoJ, SR and MNB, the main motivating factor was to counter sluggish growth and deflation. The ECB introduced a negative interest rate of 10 bps on its deposit facility in June 2014 to “underpin the firm anchoring of medium to long-term inflation expectation” (Draghi 2014). The SR introduced a negative one-week repo rate of 10 bps in February 2015 to “provide support for inflation so that it rises and stabilises around 2% in 2017” (Riksbank 2016). The BoJ imposed a negative interest rate of 10 bps in January 2016 “in order to achieve the price stability target of 2% at the earliest possible time” (BoJ 2016). The MNB, the latest entrant to the NIRP club, cut its

economies remained slow and uneven. The ultra easy credit policy failed to increase bank lending to the private sector. In us, the banks in response to QE chose to keep the excess reserve money supply either as deposits with the Fed or invested in government securities.

overnight deposit rate to -0.05% in March 2016, keeping in view the “persistently low cost-side inflationary pressure, the slowdown in global growth and the historically low level of inflation expectations” (MNB 2016).

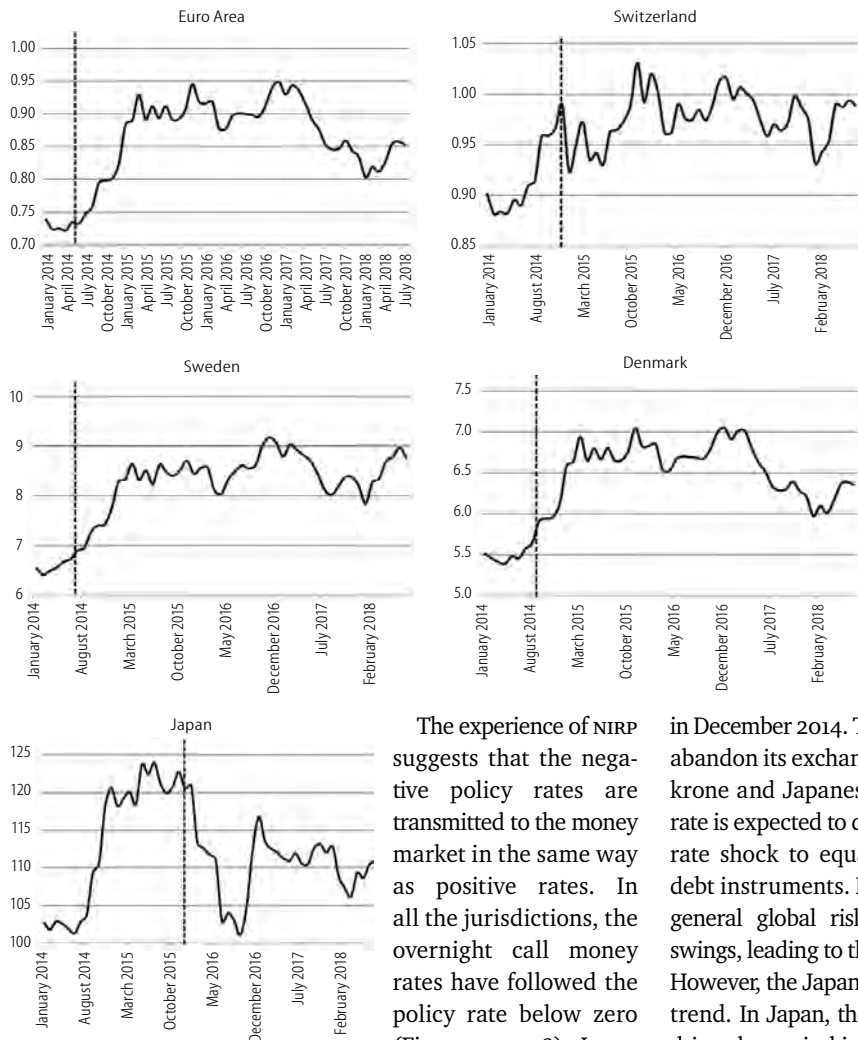
For SNB and DN, countering currency appreciation due to capital inflows was the key factor to adopt NIRP. The SNB announced a negative interest rate on 25 bps on the sight deposits account balance in December 2014 to discourage capital outflows and Swiss franc’s appreciation. The DNB first set its deposit rate below zero in July 2012, but it returned to positive territory in April 2014. The rate was cut again to negative territory in September 2014 “in order to stem the capital inflow” (Rohde 2015).

Figure 6: Deposit and Lending Rates



Sources: International Financial Statistics (IFS).

Figure 7: Bilateral Exchange Rate



Exchange rates normalised to zero beginning January 2014. The vertical line depicts the time of adoption of NIRP. Source: IFS.

encourage borrowing and lending, the absolute level of interest rates is not particularly important for intermediaries (Jackson 2015).

The transmission of NIRP beyond money markets presents a mixed picture. The yield on treasury bills and short maturity government bond yields have turned increasingly negative (Figure 4, p 49). However, in the case of longer maturity

The experience of NIRP suggests that the negative policy rates are transmitted to the money market in the same way as positive rates. In all the jurisdictions, the overnight call money rates have followed the policy rate below zero (Figure 3, p 48). It appears that if there is a positive spread to encourage borrowing and lending, the absolute level of interest rates is not particularly important for intermediaries (Jackson 2015).

bonds, there was a decline in the yields initially after the introduction of NIRP (Figure 5, p 49). However, this decline in yields cannot be attributed to NIRP solely as the central banks simultaneously pursued asset purchase programmes. Also, global forces, such as declining inflation and growth expectations, low investment and excess savings, as well as a diminishing pool of highly rated low-risk fixed income assets have put a significant downward pressure on long maturity government bonds yield (Arteta et al 2016). The transmission of NIRP beyond money markets and short maturity bonds are affected mainly on account of the reluctance of commercial banks to pass negative rates through to depositors, especially retail depositors (Figure 6). Banks worry that negative retail deposit rates may lead to mass deposit withdrawals affecting the profitability of banks. In Sweden and Japan, deposit rates moved to about zero. Time deposits rates have moved in the negative territory in Switzerland. However, to maintain the net interest margin, the banks have raised the investment and mortgage loan rates.

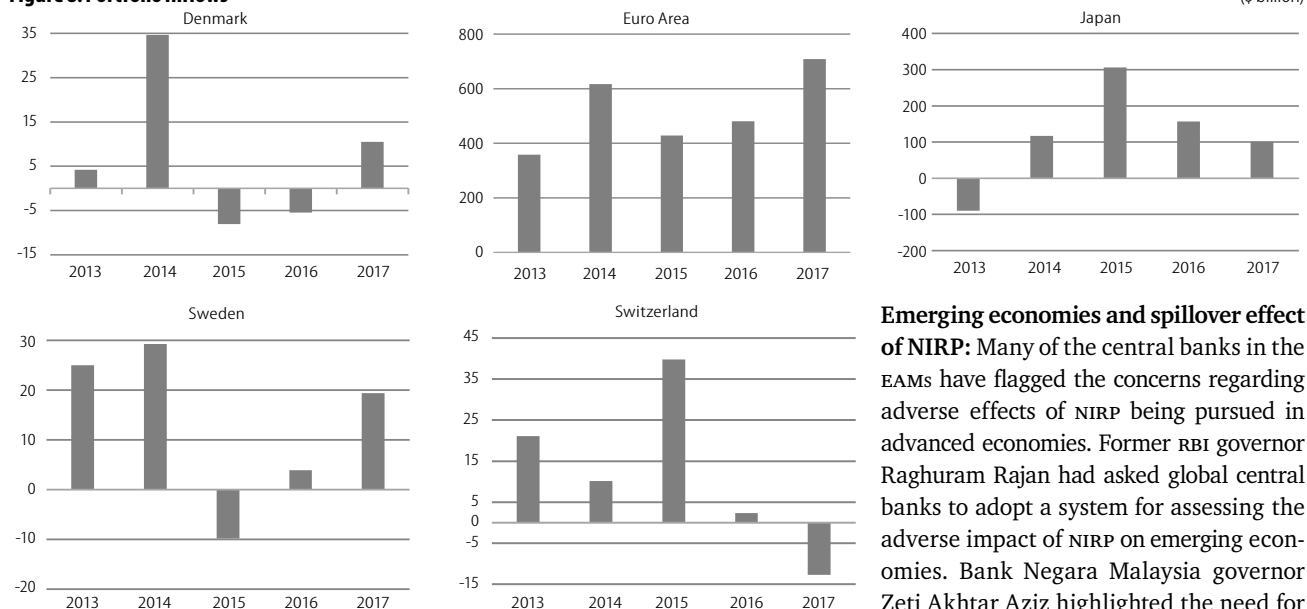
The impact of NIRP on exchange rate presents a mixed picture (Figure 7). The euro depreciated against the dollar after NIRP was adopted, but it was short-lived and the direction has reversed in the recent past. The Swedish krona has generally shown a depreciating trend against the euro. The Swiss franc appreciated after the interest rate moved in the negative territory

in December 2014. This could be attributed to the SNB's decision to abandon its exchange rate ceiling vis-à-vis the euro. The Danish krona and Japanese yen have remained stable. The exchange rate is expected to depreciate in response to the negative interest rate shock to equalise risk-adjusted real returns on various debt instruments. However, the NIRP was introduced when the general global risk environment was undergoing substantial swings, leading to the muted impact of NIRP on the exchange rate. However, the Japanese yen and Swiss franc do not confirm to this trend. In Japan, the yen appreciated post-NIRP adoption, mostly driven by capital inflows due to flight-to-safety considerations.

One of the key reasons for the adoption of NIRP was to discourage capital inflows in these jurisdictions. Except for eurozone, portfolio inflows have remained subdued in other regions post-NIRP adoption. Portfolio inflows in eurozone can be attributed to other factors, such as accommodative global liquidity and flight-to-safety (Figure 8, p 51).

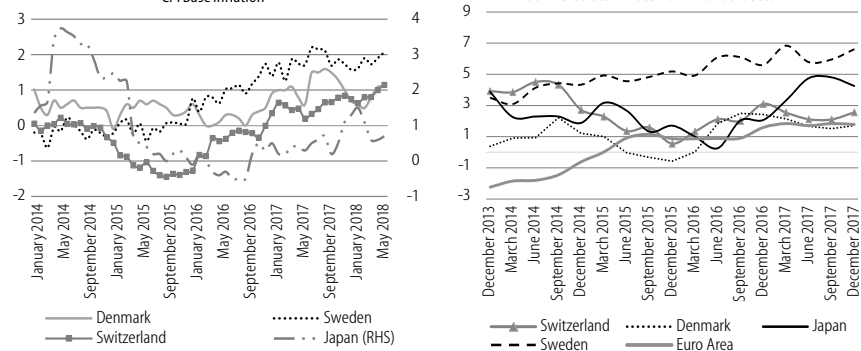
In terms of macroeconomic variables, the performance continues to remain below par post-NIRP introduction (Figure 9, p 51). The NIRP countries are still struggling to achieve the desired

Figure 8: Portfolio Inflows



Sources: IFS.

Figure 9: Key Macroeconomic Variables and NIRP



Sources: Bank of International Settlements, BOJ, ECB, IFS.

inflation level of 2%. In fact, Switzerland—where the penalty imposed on excess reserves is the maximum—witnessed disinflation for more than a year post NIRP. Not only has inflation failed to reach the desired level in these countries, bank lending has also failed to pick up. In response to the financial meltdown of 2008, the average bank lending growth plummeted and even remained negative for many quarters in Denmark and the euro area. Bank credit growth to private non-financial corporation continues to remain sluggish even after the adoption of NIRP. Banks continue to hold enormous amount of excess reserves with their central banks, even though they have to pay penalty for the same. Banks in Japan were holding excess reserves—3,000 times the required reserve—as of June 2015. Banks in the euro area were also holding excess reserves to the tune of 500 times the required reserve in July 2016. Banks’ unwillingness to lend more is reflective of the persistent macroeconomic and financial uncertainty.

However, it will not be fair to dismiss NIRP as they have not led to the desired outcome. One of the difficulties in evaluating UMP is that we do not know the counterfactual. In particular, Europe was hit by the eurozone crisis, and perhaps things would have been much worse if the ECB had not adopted the NIRP.

Emerging economies and spillover effect of NIRP: Many of the central banks in the EAMs have flagged the concerns regarding adverse effects of NIRP being pursued in advanced economies. Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan had asked global central banks to adopt a system for assessing the adverse impact of NIRP on emerging economies. Bank Negara Malaysia governor Zeti Akhtar Aziz highlighted the need for greater policy coordination among emerging countries to prevent over-reliance on monetary policy. The possible channels through which NIRP may have adverse impact on emerging economies is discussed below.

Portfolio rebalancing channel: NIRP has led to fall in the yields of short-term as well as long-term maturities bonds. In such a scenario, investors may turn to emerging market assets of similar maturities for higher risk-adjusted returns in search of higher yield. Such capital inflows may

boost asset prices rates in the emerging economies and put upward pressure on their currencies. Easing of liquidity conditions may also put inflationary pressure.

Trade route channel: NIRP may lead to the depreciation of currencies where it is adopted. If that happens, it may put adverse impact on trade balances of emerging economies that export a major share of their goods and services to these economies.

Monetary policy divergence: NIRP has led to the increasing monetary-policy divergence across major advanced economies, which has contributed to the appreciation of the dollar. This pressure has contributed to a higher cost of debt servicing and rising credit risks for emerging economies (Hofmann et al 2016).

Empirical Methodology

We proceed in two steps in our empirical study. A vector error correction model (VECM) for the US economy is estimated first. We run this model for two periods: (i) June 1997 to November 2008 (pre-crisis), and (ii) December 2008 to March 2017 (post-crisis). The pre-crisis sample is used to assess the impact on domestic us real and financial variables had the

Figure 10: Impact of Fed Rate Cut on US Economy

Response to 1 SD Cholesky Innovations

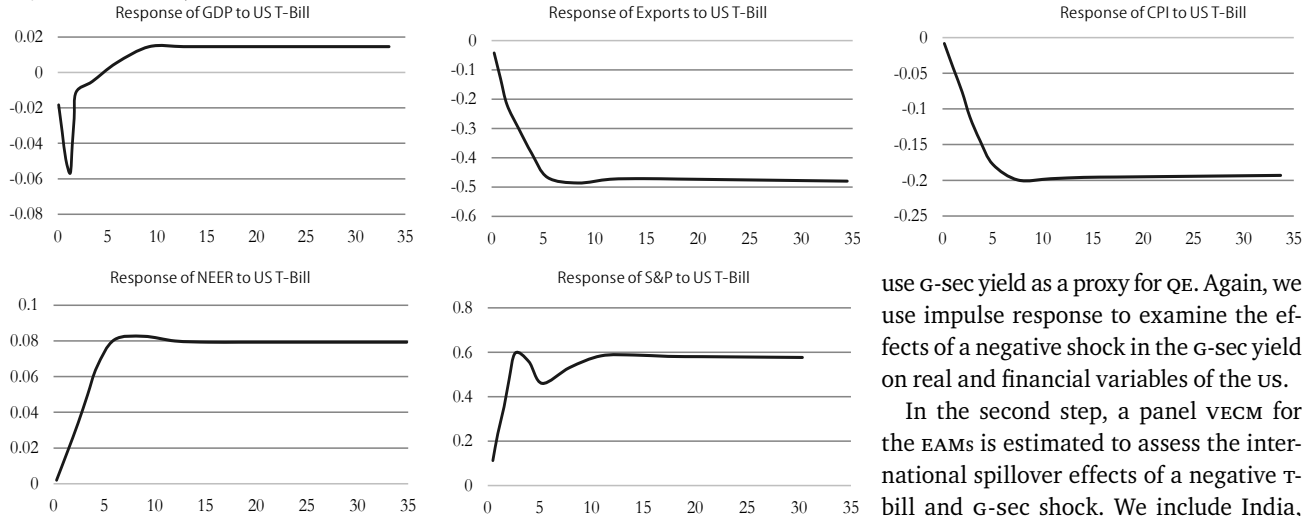
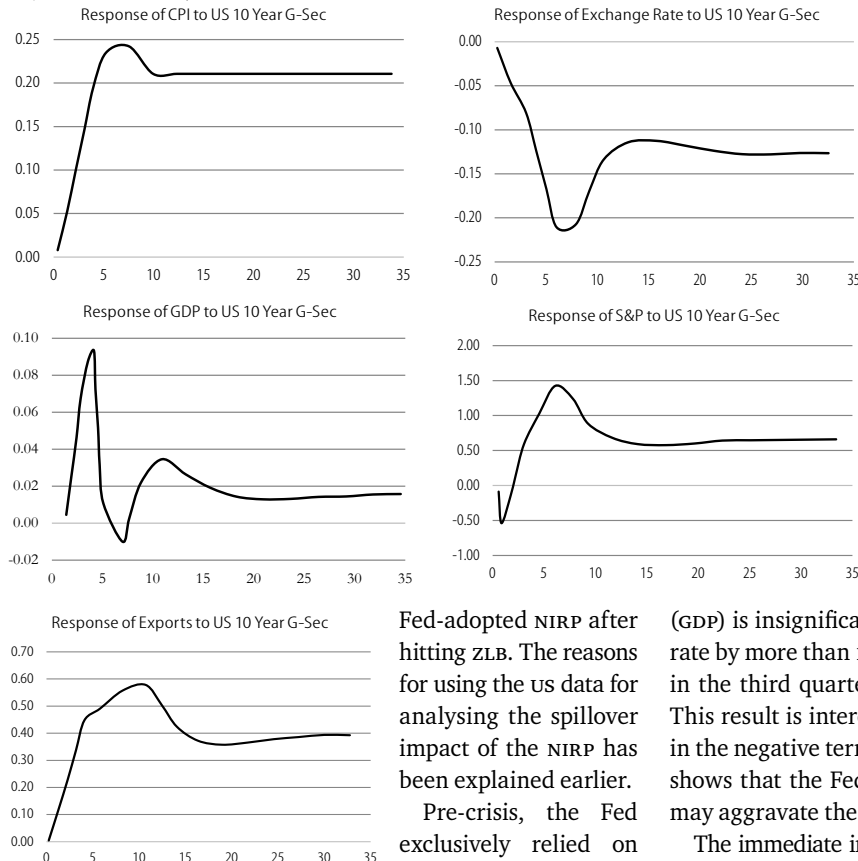


Figure 11: Impact of QE on US Economy

Response to 1 SD Cholesky Innovations



Fed-adopted NIRP after hitting ZLB. The reasons for using the us data for analysing the spillover impact of the NIRP has been explained earlier. Pre-crisis, the Fed exclusively relied on federal fund target rates as the key monetary policy tool. As discussed earlier, negative policy rates are transmitted to money market rates and short-term bond yields in very much the same way as positive rates are. Hence, we use τ -bill rates as a proxy for negative interest rates, and we look at impulse response to examine the effects of a negative shock in τ -bill on real and financial variables of the us. Similarly, in post-crisis sample, we use the same set of real and financial variables. However, instead of τ -bill rates, we

use G-sec yield as a proxy for QE. Again, we use impulse response to examine the effects of a negative shock in the G-sec yield on real and financial variables of the us.

In the second step, a panel VECM for the EAMs is estimated to assess the international spillover effects of a negative τ -bill and G-sec shock. We include India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand in our sample. Again, using pre-crisis and post-crisis samples separately for EM, we compute IRF to assess their macroeconomic variables (refer to the Annexures [p 56] for more details).

Impulse Response Analysis

Domestic effect of NIRP on the US economy: We present, in Figure 10, the impulse responses of us macroeconomic variables to a negative shock of 20 bps to three months us τ -bill (one standard deviation of the shock) over 36 months based on the pre-crisis sample.

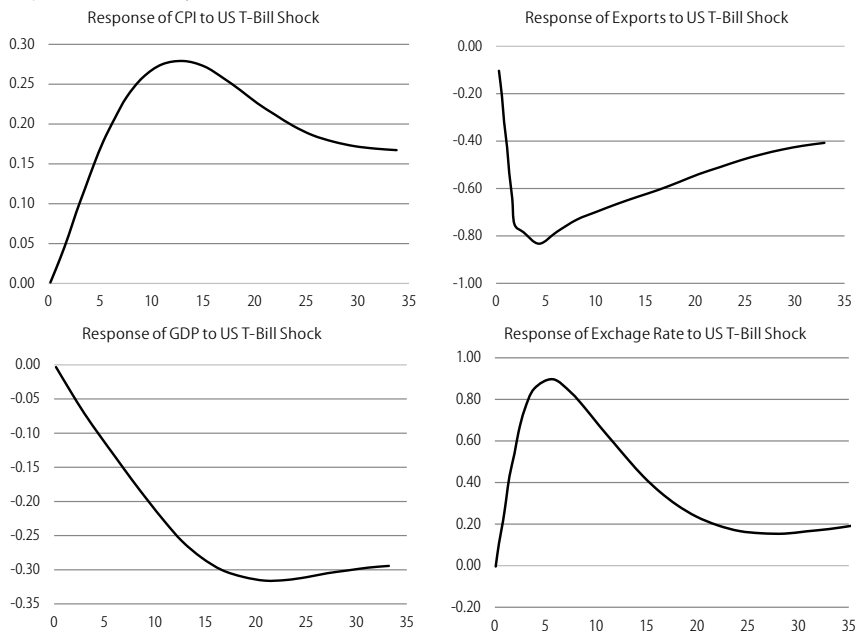
Impact on real variables: The impact of the negative shock in three months us τ -bill rate on real gross domestic product (GDP) is insignificant. The shock leads to a decline in inflation rate by more than 10 bps in the first quarter. Peak effect comes in the third quarter when the inflation rate drops by 19 bps. This result is interesting as many countries have cut the rates in the negative territory to boost inflation. However, our result shows that the Fed cutting, moving in the negative territory, may aggravate the deflationary pressures.

The immediate impact of these on the us gross exports to the rest of the world, however, is significant. Exports growth contracts by nearly 30 bps in the first quarter. The peak effect comes in the third quarter when gross exports growth fall by almost 47 bps.

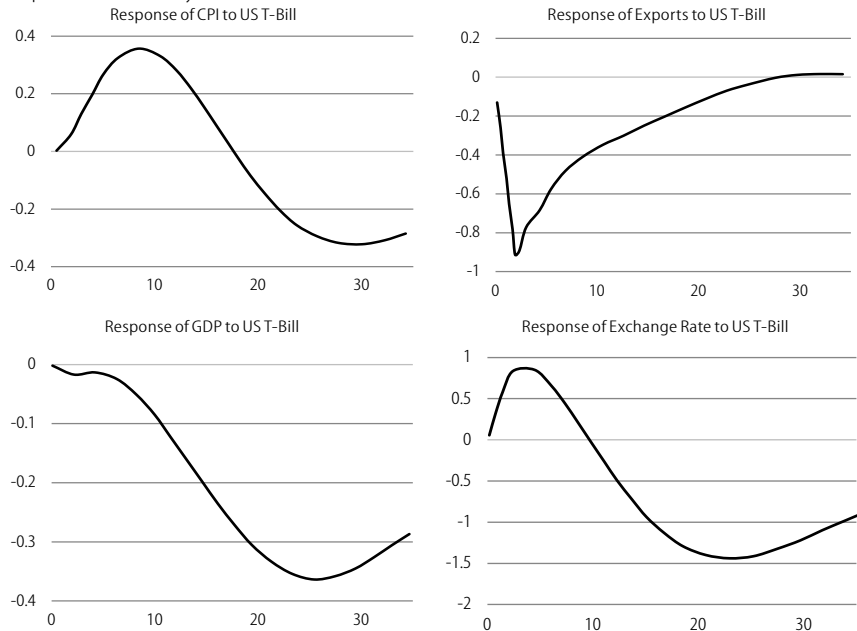
Impact on financial variables: The magnitude of the impact of the shock on nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) index is insignificant, but the direction of this impact is interesting. The NEER index appreciates immediately in response to the shock. The peak effect comes in the third quarter when the index

Figure 12: Impact of US Rate Cut on Emerging Asia

Response to 1 SD Cholesky Innovations

**Figure 13: Impact of Fed Rate Cut on Big Emerging Asian Nations**

Response to 1 SD Cholesky Innovations



appreciates by 8 bps. The standard and poor (s&p) index also goes up immediately in response to the shock. Peak effect comes in the first month itself when the s&p index goes up by 62 bps.

This exchange-rate puzzle that we find supports the findings of Glick and Leduc (2013) who found in their study that the dollar appreciates on average in response to rate cuts of less than 50 bps. Hnatkovska et al (2016) find in their paper that, in response to a monetary tightening, the nominal exchange tends to appreciate in developed countries but depreciate in developing countries. They show that lower interest rates typically have three effects—lesser demand for domestic currency denominated assets (liquidity demand effect); lower cost of credit (output

effect); and decline in debt service (fiscal effect). The liquidity demand effect causes the currency to depreciate, whereas output and fiscal effects appreciate the currency. Net effect depends on relative strengths of these offsetting forces. It is possible that, in response to Fed cutting the policy rate, the fiscal and output effects outweigh the liquidity demand effect leading to currency appreciation.

Domestic effect of QE on the US economy:

We present, in Figure 11 (p 52), the impulse responses of the US macroeconomic variables to a negative shock of 18 bps in the US 10-year G-sec yield (one SD of the shock) over 36 months. The estimates are based on the post-crisis sample.

Impact on real variables: An 18-bps negative shock on the US 10-year G-sec leads to an immediate increase in inflation by 6 bps in the first month. Peak effect is observed in the third quarter when inflation rate increases by 25 bps. The impact of the shock on real GDP is positive in the first quarter and it goes up by 10 bps. Gross exports growth too increases by 55 bps in the second quarter in response to the shock.

Impact on financial variables: The NEER index depreciates significantly in response to the shock. Peak effect comes in the second quarter when it depreciates by 20 bps. The S&P index too falls immediately by 67 bps in response to the shock. However, it starts to increase third month onwards and goes up by 160 bps in the second quarter.

Thus, a negative shock to the US 10-year G-sec yields leads to an increase in real GDP growth and inflation in the short run. The S&P index falls immediately, perhaps owing to capital outflows. The

dollar depreciates in response giving a boost to exports growth in the short run. A negative shock in the US three-month T-bill, on the contrary, is not effective in containing capital inflow leading to an increase in S&P index. The dollar appreciates as well and so does gross exports growth. Impact on inflation is adverse as well. Inflation rate falls in response to the shock. Impact on real GDP, though positive, is insignificant. Based on these results, we may conclude that QE may work better relative to NIRP.

Spillover effect of NIRP on emerging Asia: Figure 12 presents the IRF of a negative 1 SD shock (around 20 bps) to the US T-bill on

Figure 14: Impact of Fed Rate Cut on Trade-dependent Emerging Asia

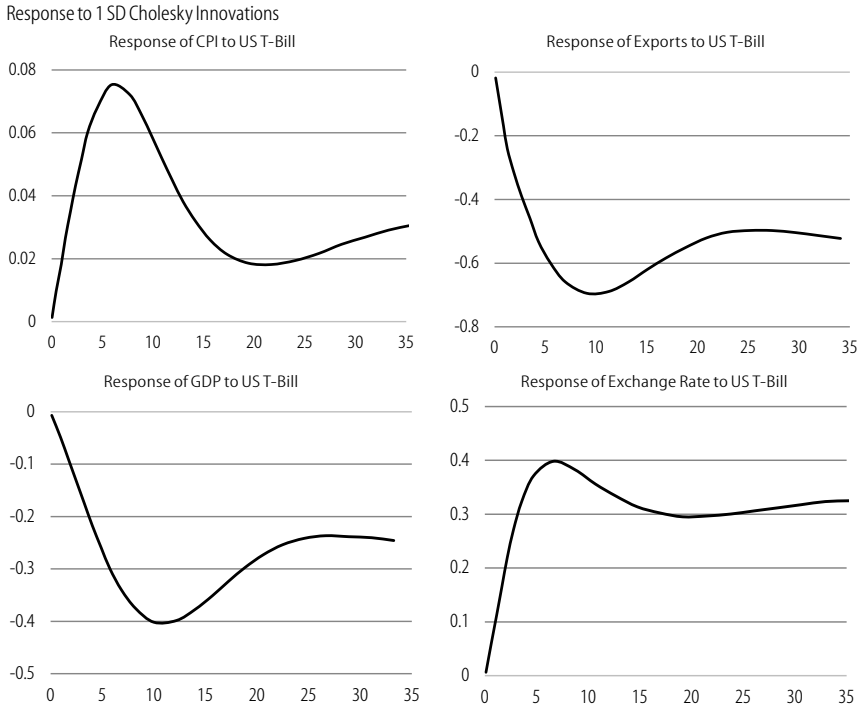
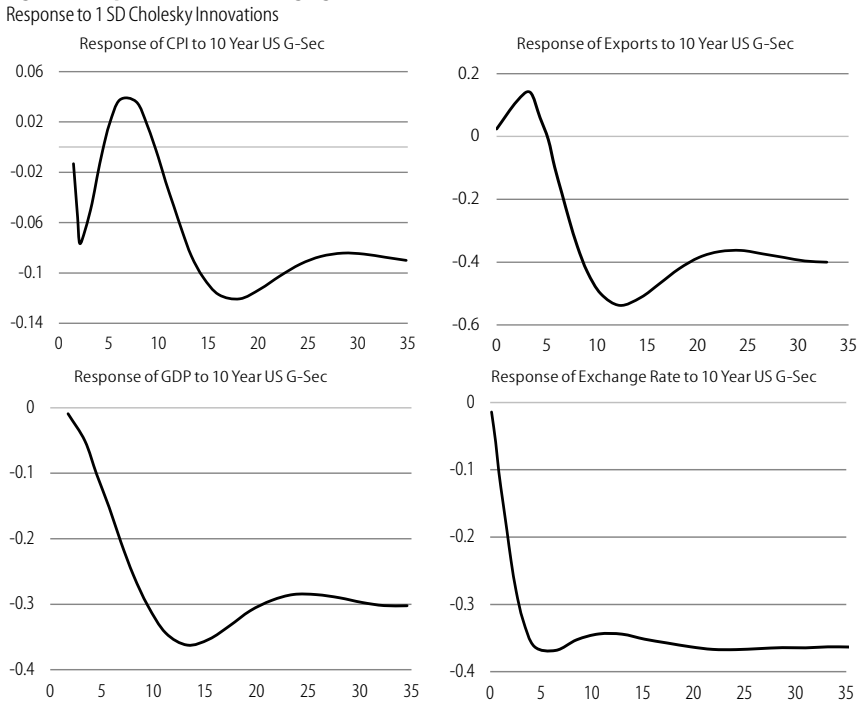


Figure 15: Impact of US QE on Emerging Asia



macroeconomic variables of emerging Asia based on pre-crisis sample of Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The impact is significant and appears to be widespread. The us t-bill shock affects all variables—nominal GDP, inflation, exports, and exchange rate. This indicates several different transmission channels could have been at play.

A 20-bps negative shock to the us t-bill leads to inflation, rising by 10-bps by the end of the first quarter. Peak effect is observed in the fourth quarter when inflation goes up by almost 30 bps.

Nominal GDP is adversely affected, and the growth declines by 25 bps in the first year. Peak effect is observed at the end of the second year when growth rate declines by 31 bps. Bilateral exchange rate vis-à-vis dollar immediately depreciates by 37 bps in response to the shock. The depreciation is more than 90 bps in the second quarter. However, the depreciation of the local currency fails to boost the gross exports to the us, and it declines by 85 bps in the second quarter.

Next, we consider two sub-groups of EMS in an extension of our panel VECM analysis: big economies—Indian and Indonesia and STDE: Hong Kong, South Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand. IRF are presented in Figure 13 (p 53) and Figure 14. The results show that the responses of these two sub-groups in response to the shock are different. India and Indonesia witness significant inflation increase (peak effect of nearly 36 bps in third quarter) compared to the STDE countries (peak effect of 8 bps in second quarter) in response to negative shock to the us t-bill rates. The impact on the GDP remains muted in the first year in the case of India and Indonesia. The STDE countries are adversely affected in the first year itself. Growth declines by just 10 bps by the end of the first year in BE countries. However, second year onwards, the decline in growth is steeper. Peak effect is observed in the third year when the growth declines by 34 bps. The STDE countries on the other hand witness a decline in growth of almost 40 bps in the first year itself.

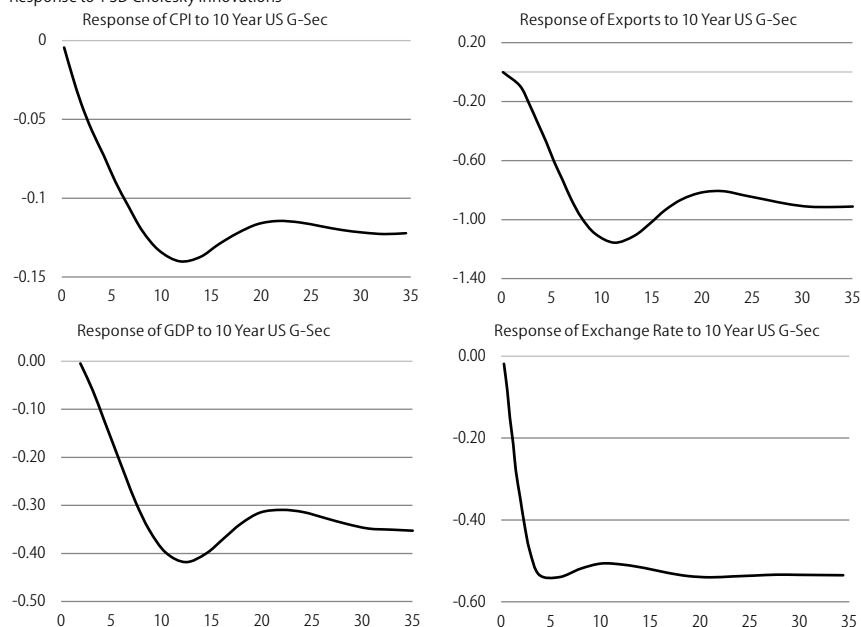
Bilateral exchanges rate against dollar first depreciate in India and Indonesia but start to appreciate second year onwards. The immediate response is that of depreciation by almost 100 bps. The second year onwards, however, the currency starts to appreciate, and the peak effect is observed towards the end of the second year, with the currency appreciating by almost 145 bps. In STDE countries, on the other hand,

the currencies depreciate by only 15 bps in immediate response. Peak effect is observed in the second quarter when the currency depreciates by 40 bps.

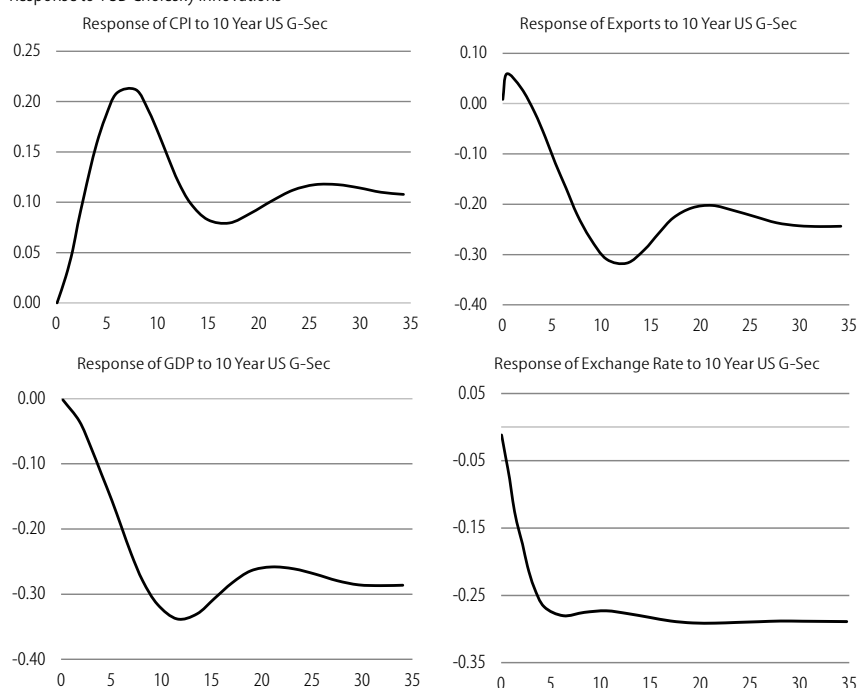
The impact on gross exports to the us is more severe for STDE countries. In India and Indonesia, exports growth to the us decline by almost 95 bps in an immediate response to the shock, but it starts to improve thereafter, and the exports, decline is only 5 bps at the end of the second year. For STDE countries, exports to the us decline by 27 bps in immediate

Figure 16: Impact of US QE on Big Emerging Asian Economy

Response to 1 SD Cholesky Innovations

**Figure 17: Impact of US QE on Trade Dependent Emerging Asian Economy**

Response to 1 SD Cholesky Innovations



response to the shock, and the decline is almost 70 bps in the fourth quarter.

Spillover effect of QE on emerging Asia: Figure 15 (p 54) represents the impact of a negative 1 SD shock (-18 bps) on the US 10 year G-sec yield on macroeconomic variables of EMs. The international transmission of a shock to G-sec yield is quite different from that of shock to T-bill. The impact on inflation of a negative shock to G-sec yield is insignificant. The nominal GDP growth, on the other hand, is more severely affected, declining by 34 bps in the first year. Bilateral exchange rate

against the dollar appreciates immediately by 18 bps in response to the shock. Peak effect comes in the second quarter when the currency appreciates by 36 bps. Growth in exports to the US also declines by 51 bps in the first year.

Next, we analyse the impact of this shock in G-sec yield for India and Indonesia and STDE countries. The IRF are presented in Figures 16 and 17. There is no significant impact on inflation in STDE countries. In India and Indonesia, the inflation rate declines by 13 bps in the first year. The nominal GDP growth declines by 40 bps in BE countries and by 32 bps in STDE countries in the first year. Currency appreciates in both sets of countries in response to the shock; however, the appreciation is stronger in India and Indonesia. Peak effect is observed in second quarter when currency appreciates by 53 bps. In STDE countries, currency appreciates by 27 bps in the first year. Exports growth too declines in both sets of countries but the impact is much severe in India and Indonesia. In response to the appreciation, exports growth to the US declines by 110 bps in the first year in India and Indonesia. In STDE countries also exports growth to the US declines by 31 bps in the first year.

Conclusions

The econometric results show that inflation in the US declines in response to a negative shock to T-bill. The impact on real GDP is insignificant and exports growth decline. Interestingly, the dollar appreciates and the S&P index go up in response. A negative shock to G-sec yields leads to an increase in real GDP growth and inflation in the short run. The S&P index falls immediately. The dollar depreciates in response giving a boost to exports growth in the short run. Based on these results, we may conclude that the Fed's decision

to use QE instead of NIRP has been successful. The nominal GDP growth as well as exports growth to the US on an average is adversely affected in EMs in response to a negative T-bill shock. The STDE countries are more severely affected. Inflation goes significantly but the impact is much more severe for India and Indonesia. Local currencies also depreciate in both sets of countries. A negative G-sec shock on the other hand has no significant impact on inflation but nominal GDP growth declines in EMs. Currency appreciates and exports to the US decline but the impact is much more severe in India and Indonesia.

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Annexures: Unit Root Tests

Table A1: ADF Unit Root Test for the US based on Pre-crisis Sample

Variable	Level	1st Difference		Critical Values	
	ADF	ADF	1% Level	5% Level	
Real GDP	-0.60	-17.41	-3.48	-2.88	
Inflation	2.55	-4.02	-3.48	-2.88	
Exports	-2.5	-5.48	-3.48	-2.88	
S&P index	-1.06	-10.35	-3.48	-2.88	
NEER index	-2.44	-7.85	-3.48	2.88	
T-bill	-1.17	-3.09	-3.48	-2.88	

Table A2: ADF Unit Root Test for the US based on Post-crisis Sample

Variable	Level	1st Difference		Critical Values	
	ADF	ADF	1% Level	5% Level	
Real GDP	-3.03	-9.23	-3.51	-2.89	
Inflation	-0.63	-3.22	-3.51	2.89	
Exports	-1.16	-5.14	-3.52	-2.90	
S&P index	-2.44	-8.31	-3.51	-2.89	
NEER index	-0.73	-3.76	-3.51	2.89	
T-bill	-2.65	-7.05	-3.51	-2.89	

Table A3: Panel Unit Root Test for the EAM based on Pre-crisis Sample

Variable	Level		1st Difference	
	Breitung	p-value	Breitung	p-value
t-stat				
Nominal				
GDP	2.39	0.99	-2.37	0.00
Inflation	0.87	0.19	-3.86	0.00
Exports	-1.39	0.08	-9.91	0.00
Exchange rate	2.63	0.99	-4.55	0.00

Table A4: Panel Unit Root Test for the EAM based on Post-crisis Sample

Variable	Level		1st Difference	
	Breitung	p-value	Breitung	p-value
t-stat				
Nominal				
GDP	-1.57	0.06	-2.78	0.00
Inflation	0.27	0.60	-2.13	0.01
Exports	-0.45	0.32	-3.77	0.00
Exchange rate	-1.28	0.10	-5.99	0.00

Table A5: Johansen Cointegration Test for US Aariables based on Pre-crisis Data

Sample (Adjusted): 1998M08 2008M11
Trend Assumption: Linear Deterministic Trend Series: Exports Inflation Neer Real_GDP S_P_INDEX T_BILL
Lags Interval (in First Differences): 1 to 1

Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace)

Hypothesised No of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Trace Statistics	0.05 Critical Value	Prob**
None *	0.2543	105.2262	95.7537	0.0095
At most 1	0.1873	68.8466	69.8189	0.0596
At most 2	0.1425	43.1341	47.8561	0.1293
At most 3	0.1235	24.0709	29.7971	0.1975
At most 4	0.0577	7.7234	15.4947	0.4954
At most 5	0.0028	0.3488	3.8415	0.5548

Trace test indicates 1 cointegrating eqn(s) at the 0.05 level.

* denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level.

** MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values.

Table A7: Johansen Fischer Panel Cointegration Test for EMs based on Pre-crisis Sample

Johansen Fisher Panel Cointegration
Test Series: CPI Exchange_Rate Exports GDP US_T_BILL
Sample: 1998 M01 2008M11

Trend Assumption: Linear Deterministic Trend Lags Interval (in First Differences): 1 1

Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace and Maximum Eigenvalue)

Hypothesised No of CE(s)	Fisher Stat*	Prob	Fisher Stat*	Prob
	(from Trace Test)		(from Max-eigen Test)	
None	168.10	0.0000	130.90	0.0000
At most 1	65.32	0.0000	41.72	0.0001
At most 2	34.24	0.0019	27.34	0.0174
At most 3	17.08	0.2522	16.89	0.2618
At most 4	14.07	0.4448	14.07	0.4448

Table A6: Johansen Cointegration test for US Variables based on Post-crisis Data

Sample (Adjusted): 2009M02 2017M03
Trend Assumption: Linear Deterministic Trend Series: Exports G_SEC Inflation NEER Real_GDP S_P_Index
Lags Interval (in First Differences): 1 to 1

Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace)

Hypothesised No of CE(s)	Eigenvalue	Trace Statistics	0.05 Critical Value	Prob**
None *	0.5125	138.5088	95.7537	0.0000
At most 1	0.2659	76.7244	69.8189	0.0127
At most 2	0.2523	50.1397	47.8561	0.0300
At most 3	0.1552	25.1391	29.7971	0.1565
At most 4	0.0931	10.6367	15.4947	0.2348
At most 5	0.0256	2.2339	3.8415	0.1350

Trace test indicates 1 cointegrating eqn(s) at the 0.05 level.

* denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level.

** MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) p-values.

Table A8: Johansen Fischer Panel Cointegration Test for EMs based on Post-crisis Sample

Johansen Fisher Panel Cointegration
Test Series: CPI Exchange_Rate Exports GDP US_10YR_G_SEC
Sample: 2008M12 2017M03 Trend

Assumption: Linear Deterministic Trend Lags Interval (in First Differences): 1 1

Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace and Maximum Eigenvalue)

Hypothesised No of CE(s)	Fisher Stat*	Prob	Fisher Stat*	Prob
	(from Trace Test)		(from Max-eigen Test)	
None	182.70	0.0000	130.6	0.0000
At most 1	79.30	0.0000	58.90	0.0000
At most 2	33.56	0.0024	21.5	0.0895
At most 3	23.51	0.0525	14.34	0.4244
At most 4	36.48	0.0009	36.48	0.0009

Water Conservation and Religious Organisations

SACHIN TIWALE

In response to Srirupa Bhattacharya's article "Groundwater, Gurus, and Governmentality: Seva in the Neo-liberal Development Regime in India" (*EPW*, 10 August 2019), this article raises a few important questions on the modalities of the implementation and, consequently, the actual impacts of the water conservation projects run by religious organisations. Using the example of the Manjra river rejuvenation project, this article further decodes Bhattacharya's observation of the gurus receiving "unprecedented structural cooperation" and "universal acceptability" from all, including the state actors.

In the article titled "Groundwater, Gurus, and Governmentality: Seva in the Neo-liberal Development Regime in India" (*EPW*, 10 August 2019), the author Srirupa Bhattacharya has illustrated upon the network emerging between the religious organisations, state actors, international funding organisations and multinational corporations while planning and executing water conservation activities in the post-liberalisation era. Citing an example of the Art of Living (AoL) and their Kumudvathi river rejuvenation project, the author has argued that while such collaborative efforts rope in a range of actors, the local actors, however, are either completely excluded or involved at much later stages of the project. In this article, I am taking this argument a step ahead to explore whether such nexus formulated by the religious organisations across bureaucracy, policymakers, capitalists, media houses, and experts can lead to better implementation and outcome of development projects (here, river rejuvenation) or not.

In this context, this article examines the Manjra river rejuvenation project initiated and led by the AoL and RSS Jankalyan Samiti (RSS-JS) for Latur city in Maharashtra in the summer of 2016. In her article, Bhattacharya (2019: 57) has, also, made passing reference to this project. This article analyses the process of implementation of the Manjra river rejuvenation project, explores the knowledge claims of the AoL and RSS-JS pertaining to water conservation by examining the validity of the approach of river rejuvenation with reference to the hydrology of the Manjra basin, and finally assessing the actual benefits in contrast to the promises made by religious organisations to gain public participation.

Despite being lauded as a successful project and even after witnessing a good

rainfall—21% excess of the normal rainfall in Marathwada (IMD 2016)—Latur was receiving water only once a week in 2017. The analysis reveals that the project was conceived and planned with a poor understanding of the river basin, the water needs of Latur city, and the existing water supply infrastructure. The assessment of the project implementation discloses the violation of multiple rules of regulations.

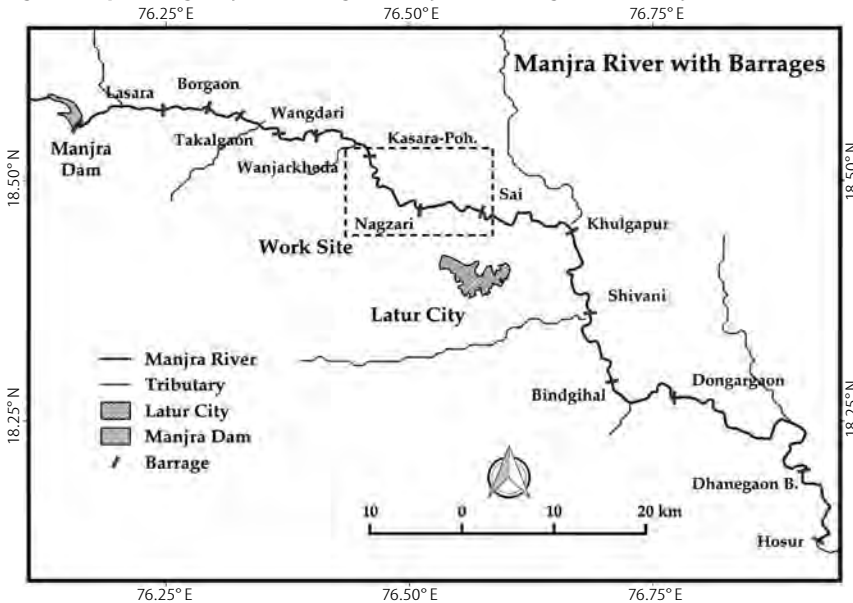
Bhattacharya (2019: 55) observed that the gurus receive "unprecedented structural cooperation" and "universal acceptability" from all, including the state actors. This article argues that the relationship between religious organisation and state goes beyond "acceptability" and, at some point, the state actors are co-opted by the religious organisation, blurring the boundaries between the religious organisation and the state. The state actors are not only silent observers of the activities of religious organisation, often violating the rules and regulations, but under their influence can often actively engage and perform those activities, violating its own rules.

Manjra River Rejuvenation

In early 2016, as a result of the second consecutive drought, all sources of drinking water supply of the Latur Municipal Corporation (LMC) went dry. In response to this crisis, AoL and RSS-JS gathered local leaders and residents together to form Jalyukta Latur Samiti (JLS, henceforth)¹ with the objective of strengthening the water sources of the city. The JLS decided to rejuvenate the Manjra river by deepening and widening the upstream river channel of the two barrages—Sai and Nagzari—to create a storage of 18 million cubic metres (mcm), which the JLS claimed would be sufficient to meet the drinking water demand of the city (Ghadyalpatil 2016; Thomas 2016) (Figure 1, p 58).

The rejuvenation work was proclaimed as a permanent solution for the water crisis of Latur city, and the residents and others were appealed to for contributing to the project that promises piped water supply to the city every alternate day.² Unlike the Kumudvathi river rejuvenation

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Figure 1: Map Showing Manjra River along with Manjra Dam, Barrages and River Rejuvenation Worksite

case, as elaborated by Bhattacharya (2019), here, the private corporations, organisations and the common people, including residents of Latur city, participated in the rejuvenation work since its inception. However, this participation was limited to only monetary contribution and voluntary labour, while the entire idea was conceived and executed by the leading religious organisations. They successfully raised around ₹70 million from the people and excavated 4.3 mcm of silt using more than 25 massive earth-moving machines, over a period of two months. Environmentalists have already criticised such massive excavation affecting river ecology (Chari and Sharma 2016; Jamwal 2016). Therefore, I am not reproducing those arguments here.

Assessing Knowledge Claims

The leading religious organisations, AoL and RSS-JS, were so confident about the deepening and widening of the river that they initiated work without preparing any feasibility report and detailed project report. As explained by one of the AoL leaders, Mahadev Gomare,

Preparation of feasibility report and DPR leads to wastage of time. We want to work fast. We do not want to work like government engineers.³

While interacting with the AoL leaders, I realised that none of them were formally trained in hydrology, geology and river ecology. As Bhattacharya (2019) explained,

the guru and their religious organisations are perceived as omniscient, and therefore, no one involved in the project raised questions over the feasibility of the project and fulfilment of its stated objectives.

In this section, I am assessing the knowledge claims of AoL and RSS-JS through three fundamental questions: (i) Is there any excess water available in the river basin before being stored?; (ii) is it logical to dig a river when the city already has enough water reservation in upstream dam?; and (iii) can Latur city use this additionally created storage capacity?

Is There Any Excess Water?

Though the JLS was intended to create 18 mcm of storage, the question is whether the basin had that volume of excess water to fill the additionally created storage. The analysis of water availability data at basin scale and existing storage structures constructed on the Manjra river indicates that there is no such excess water available.

As per the Godavari river basin plan prepared by the Water Resources Department (WRD) of Government of Maharashtra, Manjra basin is already facing water shortages (WRD 2017). The total water availability in Manjra basin is 623 mcm; however, the live storage capacity of completed and ongoing projects is 628 mcm. The total permitted water use is 777 mcm,⁴ surpassing the total water availability by

154 mcm (WRD 2015, 2017). Therefore, Manjra basin is an overdeveloped and closed basin⁵ where the capacity of existing water storage structures and total permitted water use is much more than the quantity of renewable water available in the basin. There is no “excess” water available that can just be stored by the widening and deepening of a river channel.

Is It Logical?

The Manjra dam alone supplies 20 mcm of water to Latur city through direct pipelines constructed from the dam to the city, which was enough to meet the then water demand of the city. One of the claims made by JLS members in support of their work was that the additional storage created by them would help Latur in times of distress. However, the validity of this claim is questionable. As Figure 1 indicates, the largest reservoir of the Manjra basin, with a capacity of 250.7 mcm, is located upstream of Latur city (cwc 2015). This is followed by a series of 14 barrages constructed on the river, before it enters Karnataka. Nagzari and Sai are two such barrages that were built to supply 4.26 mcm⁶ water for Latur city and JLS was focusing on the strengthening of these sources through widening and deepening activities.

However, between the Manjra dam and the Nagzari barrage, over a river channel length of 50 km, six barrages already exist. Also, there is no major tributary bringing additional water from the catchment to these two barrages. As a result, the inflow in Nagzari and Sai barrages is mainly controlled by the Manjra dam and the six upstream barrages. Unless these upstream structures overflow or release water, Nagzari and Sai will not get adequate water to fill the additionally created storage capacity by JLS. So, the question is: In the absence of excess water in the highly controlled and regulated basin, how will these barrages get water to fill the additionally created storage?

Digging a river channel and creating a shallow water storage cannot be appropriate solutions as this would increase evaporation and seepage losses than facilitate water storage even in the dam itself. This indicates that the entire

programme was wrongly conceived, and it could have been avoided if a proper feasibility study would have been conducted. Moreover, even if water is conserved somehow in these two barrages, then the LMC needs to officially reserve that additional water from the WRD before using it. But, with the existing water reservations exceeding total availability by 158 mcm and Latur city already having sufficient reservation in the Manjra dam, it is most unlikely that it will get official reservation of the water as it is going to create conflicts among water users. Since the basin is closed, the water conservation practice needs to be evaluated carefully before implementation, as it can lead to reallocation of existing water usages without official reservation. Then, Latur city will be using the water share of the downstream users. It further means that the urban water users of Latur city are grabbing the water of downstream farmers and villagers and depriving them from fulfilling their drinking and irrigation water needs.

Can Latur Use the Stored Water?

The other important question is that if water is somehow stored in the additionally created capacity, then can Latur use the stored water to fulfil its demand? Unfortunately, the answer is no. No infrastructural arrangement was made at Nagzari and Sai barrages to pick up the additionally stored water, treat it and pump it towards the city.⁷ Without cross-checking the adequacy of the required infrastructure, the widening and deepening of the river yielded nothing for the citizens of Latur, apart from damaging the river channel and riverine ecosystem.

An interview with an engineer from the water supply department of LMC revealed that the department was never consulted while preparing and executing the entire plan. This itself questions the participatory mechanism of the project implementers. At Nagzari barrage, which is bigger in size, the level of additional storage created by deepening was well below the existing jackwell.⁸ Therefore, the available infrastructure was not able to fetch the additionally stored water.⁹ As a result of such planning blunders, not a single drop of water from

the work of the AoL and RSS-JS has reached the taps of the citizens in Latur, despite spending around ₹70 million for the conservation project, even after witnessing a rainfall in 2017 that was 21% in excess of the average normal rainfall in Latur (IMD 2016). Residents in Latur were still receiving water only once in a week.

Reality vs Populism

This approach of widening and deepening adopted by the AoL and RSS-JS is a popular technocratic supply-side measure that neglects the real issues of water supply systems. The distribution network of Latur city is old and leaky, causing significant water losses. The non-revenue water (NRW) in Latur is estimated in the range of 50%–55%. The water treatment plants are poorly maintained.¹⁰ Therefore, such efforts of increasing water availability at the source are questionable when half of this water is lost in the distribution network. Thus, in the year following the rejuvenation work of 2016, even after witnessing an excess rainfall and adequate availability of water in the Manjra dam, the LMC could not use its own water quota because of the bottlenecks existing in the network and treatment plants, and continued supplying water only once in a week.

However, activities like reducing losses and increasing the efficiency of the water supply system or increasing groundwater tables by rainwater harvesting in the city are perhaps not as attractive as a massive worksite where more than 25 excavators and 50 dumpers are operating and changing the landscape, with politically eminent people making site visits and or appearances at events to mark the project's success (*Scroll* 2016; *Samvada* 2016), while any critical evaluation of the project's efficacy remains far-fetched. Initially started with the objective of permanently tackling water scarcity of the city, the project later became a mere symbol of success with the pictures of the deepened and widened channel brimming with water, an obvious occurrence after a good rainfall. No one questioned whether the intended purpose was met or not. Even in a booklet published by the JLS, after the completion of

the work, there was no mention of its precise impact on the water supply of Latur city.¹¹

Blurring Boundaries

In her paper, Bhattacharya (2019: 55) has had mentioned the “uncontainability” of gurus and “unprecedented structural cooperation” they receive because of the belief in their omniscient nature. These characteristics of gurus and their respective religious organisations have also played critical roles during the implementation of the Manjra river rejuvenation project (Tiwale and Deshmukh 2017). The Manjra river, being a sixth order stream, was not at all eligible for widening and deepening activities, which are commonly prescribed for small streams and rivulets (GoM 2013, 2015).¹²

At the local level, though the public officials were not officially involved in the implementation processes, they were very much aware about the AoL and RSS-JS work and that it was violating multiple rules. Yet they refrained from taking any action, such as invoking Section 93 of the Maharashtra Irrigation Act, 1976 (GoM 1976), which empowers an irrigation officer to intervene in the work of modifying the river channel and prohibiting the act of damaging, altering, enlarging and obstructing a notified river.

An executive engineer of the WRD, who had visited the worksite multiple times when rejuvenation work was going on, when asked about his visits and about not taking any actions, replied,¹³

I am not officially involved with this (Manjra) case. The collector office never consulted with us (irrigation department) regarding this work ... I visited the site as an individual citizen of Latur ... I also used to visit the Nagzari barrage to ensure the safety of barrage structure and especially its foundation as deepening was going on. I did not monitor the activities of deepening and widening of the river bed.

In fact, the boundaries between the state actors and the religious organisations were so blurred that this work by AoL and RSS-JS, violating multiple rules and regulations initiated, was inaugurated, visited and even applauded by bureaucrats, ministers and experts (*Scroll* 2016; *Sakal* 2016).¹⁴ Ironically, the then chief minister of the state had

announced the support of ₹54.7 million for this project; and according to an engineer of the WRD it was the first project where the department had received money before any technical sanction.¹⁵ This explains the inertia of the state officials in intervening, even when the rules and regulations get violated.

This illustrates the relationship between the state actors and the gurus and their religious organisations. The guru is pervasive and manages all—from local bureaucracy to ministers and chief minister of states in such a way that no one counters their actions violating the Constitution. In fact, at a later stage, the state itself is aligned with the guru, becomes a partner in violating its own rules, and contributes in the ruination of a river ecosystem of which the state is a custodian. At the same time, the findings from the Manjra project raise concerns over the increasing involvement of such religious organisations proclaiming themselves as water experts and the saviours of people from water crises, while tinkering with the sensitive river ecosystem with their questionable knowledge claims towards water conservation.

NOTES

- 1 The complete name is Sarvajani Jalyukta Latur Vyavasthapan Samiti but often referred to as Jalyukta Latur Samiti (JLS).
- 2 Considering the past situation of Latur city, even an assurance of alternate day water supply was promising enough to catch the attention of citizens.
- 3 Interview with members of Jalyukta Latur Samiti (JLS) and Art of Living (AoL) leader Mahadev Gomare.
- 4 This does not include environmental water use—water needed for natural ecosystem.
- 5 Closed basin is defined as a basin where water use has exceeded or approaching to the total renewable water available in the basin.
- 6 Interview with water supply engineer of Latur Municipal Corporation.
- 7 Originally, for extracting water from these barrages, two independent intake wells, water treatment plants and pumping stations were constructed at Nagzari and Sai barrages. However, over the period, LMC was gradually shifted to Manjra dam to meet its demand. In 2016, while collecting the data, the water treatment plant of Nagzari (Warwanti) was found to be not functioning for last 10 years and water treatment plant of Sai (Arvi) was barely working at half of its design capacity because of ageing and poor maintenance.
- 8 A construction of a well in a river channel to lift the water using pump.
- 9 Additional arrangement is needed to extract the water from Nagzari barrage, which includes installation of a pump and a new pipeline. According to water supply engineer, even

a temporary makeshift arrangement (floating pumps and pipeline) to extract water was costing ₹2–₹2.5 million and if water supply department wants to plan a permeant measure by shifting the jackwell at a lower level, then it is going to cost approximately ₹30 million. Similarly, additional investment is needed at Sai barrage.

- 10 Interview with water supply engineer.
- 11 In the post-implementation period, some members of AoL and JLS talked about increase in groundwater level and water made available for farmers, as an impact of their work. However, it is like changing a goalpost, as these objectives could have been achieved by implementing other measures (for example, watershed development) without damaging the river ecosystem and the farmlands of neighbouring farmers.
- 12 Stream deepening work was only permitted for second and third order streams.
- 13 Personal interview with an executive engineer of the state water resource department.
- 14 Based on information available on JLS mobile app.
- 15 Same as note 13.

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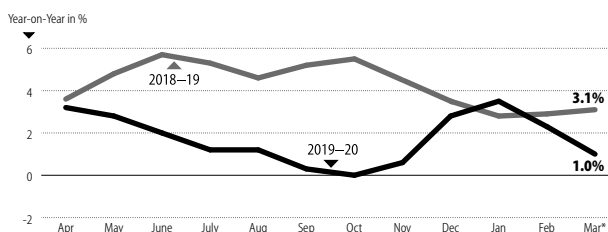
Wholesale Price Index

The annual inflation rate of WPI decreased to 1.7% during April–March 2019–20 from 4.3% registered during the corresponding period of the previous year 2018–19. The index for primary articles declined by (-)0.8% in April 2020 against 6.6% reported a year ago and 3.7% a month ago. The food index decreased by 2.6% compared to 6.4% recorded a year ago and 4.9% a month ago. The index for fuel and power fell by (-)10.1% against 3.8% registered a year ago. The WPI index for all commodities was not computed because of the non-availability of the index for manufactured products.

Consumer Price Index

The CPI-inflation rate increased to 5.9% in March 2020 from 2.9% registered a year ago, but was lower than 6.6% reported in February 2020. The consumer food price index rose by 8.8% against 0.3% reported a year ago, but was lower than 10.8% a month ago. The CPI-rural inflation rate stood at 6.1% and the urban inflation rate at 5.7% compared to 1.8% and 4.1%, recorded a year ago. As per Labour Bureau data, the CPI-inflation rate of agricultural labourers (CPI-AL) increased to 8.8% in April 2020 from 5.0% registered a year ago while that of industrial workers (CPI-IW) decreased to 5.4% from 8.3% reported a year ago.

Movement of WPI Inflation April–March



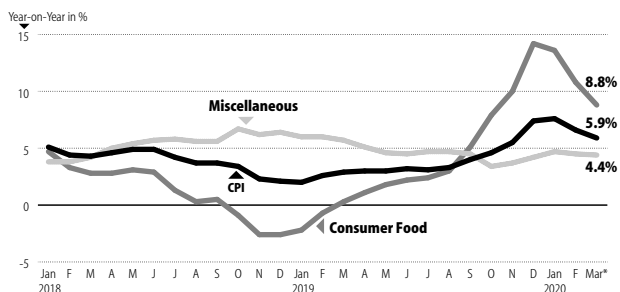
* Data is provisional; Base: 2011–12 = 100.

Trends in WPI and Its Components April 2020* (%)

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Averages)		
				2017–18	2018–19	2019–20
All commodities	100	-	-	2.9	4.3	1.7
Primary articles	22.6	-0.9	-0.8	1.4	2.7	6.9
Food articles	15.3	0.7	2.6	2.1	0.3	8.4
Fuel and power	13.2	-8.2	-10.1	8.2	11.5	-1.7
Manufactured products	64.2	-	-	2.7	3.7	0.3

* Data is provisional; Base: 2011–12=100; Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Movement of CPI Inflation January 2018–March 2020



* Data is provisional. Source: National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Base: 2012=100.

CPI: Rural and Urban March 2020* (%)

	Latest Month Index	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs)	
				2018–19	2019–20
CPI Combined	148.7	-0.3	5.9	3.4	4.3
Rural (2012=100)	149.8	-0.4	6.1	3.0	5.4
Urban (2012=100)	147.4	-0.2	5.7	3.9	4.8

CPI: Occupation-wise#

	Latest Month Index	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs)	
				2018–19	2019–20
Industrial workers (2001=100)	329.0	0.9	5.4	5.4	7.5
Agricultural Labourers (1986–87=100)	1014.0	0.7	8.8	2.1	8.0

Provisional; #April 2020 Source: NSO (rural & urban); Labour Bureau (IW and AL).

Foreign Trade

The trade deficit stood at \$6.8 billion (bn) in April 2020 compared to \$15.3 bn registered a year ago. Exports declined by (-)60.3% to \$10.4 bn from \$26.1 bn recorded a year ago. Imports decreased by (-)58.7% to \$17.1 bn from \$41.1 bn. Oil imports were lower by (-)59.0% to \$4.7 bn and non-oil imports by (-)58.5% to \$12.5 bn and \$30.0 bn, respectively. During the financial year 2019–20, cumulative exports declined by (-)4.8% to \$314.3 bn and imports by (-)9.1% to \$467.2 bn from \$330.1 bn and \$514.1 bn, respectively, recorded in 2018–19.

Index of Industrial Production

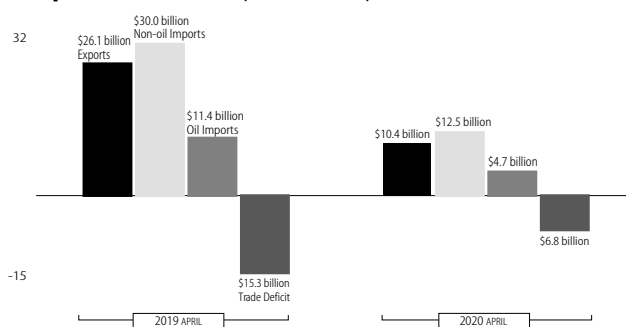
The year-on-year IIP growth rate declined to -16.7% in March 2020 from 2.7% reported a year ago with growth in manufacturing segment falling to -20.6% from 3.1%. Production in mining sector remained unchanged and electricity generation declined by (-)6.8% against 2.2%. As per use-based classification, the growth in capital goods segment fell to -35.6% and infrastructure goods to -23.8% from their respective growth rates of -9.1% and 5.1%. Production of consumer durables contracted by (-)33.1% and of non-durables by (-)16.2% against -3.2% and 1.4%, respectively.

Merchandise Trade April 2020

	April 2020 (\$ bn)	Over Month (%)	Over Year (%)	April–March (2019–20 over 2018–19) (%)
Exports	10.4	-51.6	-60.3	-4.8
Imports	17.1	-45.1	-58.6	-9.1
Trade Deficit	6.8	-30.7	-55.9	-16.9

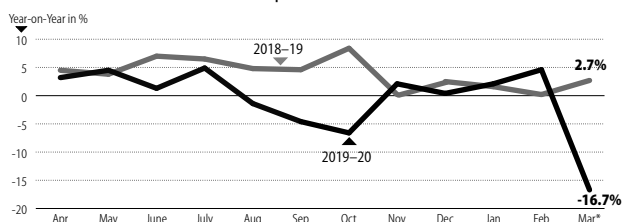
Data is provisional. Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Components of Trade April 2019 and April 2020



Oil refers to crude petroleum and petroleum products, while non-oil refers to all other commodities.

Movement of IIP Growth April–March



* March 2020 are quick estimates; Base: 2011–12=100.

Industrial Growth: Sector-wise March 2020* (%)

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs)	
				2018–19	2019–20
General index	100	-10.0	-16.7	3.8	-0.7
Mining	14.4	7.5	0.0	2.9	1.7
Manufacturing	77.6	-13.9	-20.6	3.9	-1.3
Electricity	8.0	-3.0	-6.8	5.2	1.1

Industrial Growth: Use-based

	Weights	Over Month	Over Year	Financial Year (Avgs)	
				2018–19	2019–20
Primary goods	34.0	3.4	-3.1	3.5	0.8
Capital goods	8.2	-21.6	-35.6	2.7	-13.7
Intermediate goods	17.2	-11.1	-18.5	0.9	8.8
Infrastructure/Construction goods	12.3	-16.0	-23.8	7.3	-4.0
Consumer durables	12.8	-25.3	-33.1	5.5	-8.4
Consumer non-durables	15.3	-16.0	-16.2	4.0	0.5

* March 2020 are quick estimates; Base: 2011–12=100; Source: NSO, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Comprehensive current economic statistics with regular weekly updates are available at: <http://www.epwrf.in/currentstat.aspx>.

■ India's Quarterly Estimates of Final Expenditures on GDP

₹ Crore At 2011-12 Prices	2017-18				2018-19				2019-20			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Private final consumption expenditure	1769688 (9.3)	1750056 (5.5)	1911901 (5.3)	1948175 (7.7)	1889008 (6.7)	1903853 (8.8)	2046415 (7.0)	2068782 (6.2)	1992967 (5.5)	2025488 (6.4)	2182352 (6.6)	2125099 (2.7)
Government final consumption expenditure	362769 (21.6)	367882 (7.4)	319547 (10.5)	293024 (8.9)	393709 (8.5)	407780 (10.8)	341988 (7.0)	335089 (14.4)	418249 (6.2)	465643 (14.2)	387729 (13.4)	380747 (13.6)
Gross fixed capital formation	958859 (0.7)	967190 (5.9)	1014300 (8.8)	1120847 (13.7)	1082670 (12.9)	1077942 (11.5)	1130201 (11.4)	1170154 (4.4)	1132195 (4.6)	1035736 (-3.9)	1071838 (-5.2)	1094323 (-6.5)
Change in stocks	49996 (61.7)	54050 (75.8)	52497 (78.3)	59252 (79.6)	64131 (28.3)	66159 (22.4)	63999 (21.9)	70126 (18.4)	67328 (5.0)	66999 (1.3)	64718 (1.1)	70445 (0.5)
Valuables	62905 (80.1)	46317 (25.0)	39512 (11.2)	43928 (1.5)	41080 (-34.7)	44629 (-3.6)	39252 (-0.7)	44772 (1.9)	51347 (25.0)	51761 (16.0)	43368 (10.5)	46153 (3.1)
Net trade (Export-import)	-137041	-85422	-128661	-125231	-122238	-141491	-104580	-51926	-117242	-76355	-44444	-59686
Exports	627176 (3.9)	639543 (4.5)	646620 (4.4)	688438 (5.0)	686695 (9.5)	719352 (12.5)	748505 (15.8)	767991 (11.6)	708546 (3.2)	703282 (-2.2)	703023 (-6.1)	702809 (-8.5)
Less imports	764217 (21.8)	724965 (10.5)	775281 (14.1)	813669 (23.6)	808933 (5.9)	860843 (18.7)	853085 (10.0)	819917 (0.8)	825788 (2.1)	779637 (-9.4)	747467 (-12.4)	762495 (-7.0)
Discrepancies	69397	132000	105705	151725	10803	73679	-17242	52683	-9576	15062	-62812	146521
Gross domestic product (GDP)	3136572 (5.1)	3232072 (7.3)	3314801 (8.7)	3491719 (7.4)	3359162 (7.1)	3432553 (6.2)	3500033 (5.6)	3689678 (5.7)	3535267 (5.2)	3584335 (4.4)	3642748 (4.1)	3803601 (3.1)

■ India's Overall Balance of Payments (Net): Quarterly

Item	2018-19 (\$ mn)				2019-20 (\$ mn)				2018-19 (₹ bn)				2019-20 (₹ bn)			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Current account	-15803	-19054	-17752	-4647	-14417	-6512	-1417	-1059 [-2.3]	-1337 [-2.9]	-1279 [-2.7]	-328 [-0.7]	-1003 [-2.0]	-459 [-0.9]	-101 [-0.2]		
Merchandise	-45751	-50037	-49281	-35214	-46182	-38085	-34625	-3065	-3510	-3552	-2482	-3212	-2682	-2466		
Invisibles	29947	30984	31529	30567	31765	31573	33208	2006	2174	2272	2154	2209	2224	2365		
Services	18676	20256	21678	21331	20076	20444	21880	1251	1421	1562	1503	1396	1440	1558		
of which: Software services	18605	19286	19895	19868	20998	21064	21455	1246	1353	1434	1400	1460	1484	1528		
Transfers	17031	19331	17424	16160	17964	19952	18693	1141	1356	1256	1139	1249	1405	1331		
of which: Private	17216	19511	17558	16317	18224	20188	18932	1153	1369	1265	1150	1267	1422	1349		
Income	-5760	-8603	-7573	-6925	-6275	-8822	-7364	-386	-604	-546	-488	-436	-621	-525		
Capital account	4787	16604	13770	19241	28208	12283	22355	321 [0.7]	1165 [2.5]	992 [1.2]	1356 [2.7]	1962 [4.0]	865 [1.7]	1592 [3.1]		
of which: Foreign investment	1427	7612	5199	15856	19041	10389	17802	96	534	375	1117	1324	732	1268		
Overall balance	-11338	-1868	-4296	14162	13984	5118	21601	-760 [-1.7]	-131 [-0.3]	-310 [-0.6]	998 [2.0]	973 [2.0]	360 [0.7]	1539 [3.0]		

Figures in square brackets are percentage to GDP.

■ Foreign Exchange Reserves

Excluding gold but including revaluation effects	2018-19 (\$ mn)				2019-20 (\$ mn)				2018-19 (₹ bn)				2019-20 (₹ bn)			
	29 May 2020	31 May 2019	31 March 2020	Over Month	Over Year	2019-20	2020-21	Variation	2015-16	2016-17	Financial Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20		
₹ crore	3453011	456640	395578	3344616	11898	61063	8764	218620	25300	353270	68050	146168	668976			
\$ mn	456640	11427	21290	443645	58957	83458	148830	16297	10160	53217	-14168	56831				

■ Monetary Aggregates

₹ Crore	Outstanding 2020	Over Month	Over Year	Variation				
				2019-20	2020-21	2017-18	Financial Year	
Money supply (M ₂) as on 22 May	17231582	209789 (1.2)	1810505 (11.7)	-10989 (-0.1)	431652 (2.6)	1170657 (9.2)	1469479 (10.5)	1367864 (8.9)
Components								
Currency with public	2512850	88027 (3.6)	395484 (18.7)	65157 (3.2)	163135 (6.9)	495583 (39.2)	292496 (16.6)	297506 (14.5)
Demand deposits	1567065	-22805 (-1.4)	139313 (9.8)	-198760 (-12.2)	-170627 (-9.8)	86962 (6.2)	142800 (9.6)	11180 (6.8)
Time deposits	1311039	142609 (1.1)	1262632 (10.7)	125903 (1.1)	436123 (3.4)	585266 (5.8)	1026348 (9.6)	952412 (8.1)
Other deposits with RBI	41528	1958 (4.9)	13076 (46.0)	-3290 (-10.4)	3021 (7.8)	2817 (13.4)	7835 (32.8)	6765 (21.3)
Sources								
Net bank credit to government	5551562	135366 (2.5)	947156 (20.6)	215917 (4.9)	644979 (13.1)	144799 (3.8)	387090 (9.7)	518094 (11.8)
Bank credit to commercial sector	10874871	-44177 (-0.4)	645211 (6.3)	-153059 (-1.5)	-163774 (-1.5)	802225 (9.5)	1169004 (12.7)	655926 (6.3)
Net foreign exchange assets	3908662	38560 (1.0)	772112 (24.6)	65709 (2.1)	109760 (2.9)	364065 (12.2)	148546 (5.1)	728061 (23.7)
Banking sector's net non-monetary liabilities	3129827	-80040 (-2.5)	554378 (21.5)	139579 (5.7)	159313 (5.4)	140995 (6.8)	235395 (10.7)	534644 (21.9)
Reserve money as on 29 May	3131576	65382 (2.1)	331472 (11.8)	29623 (1.1)	101903 (3.4)	518300 (27.3)	351701 (14.5)	259192 (9.4)
Components								
Currency in circulation	2616468	81334 (3.2)	419143 (19.1)	60554 (2.8)	169189 (6.9)	494078 (37.0)	307423 (16.8)	310508 (14.5)
Bankers' deposits with RBI	468973	-17366 (-3.6)	-104108 (-18.2)	-28888 (-4.8)	-74915 (-13.8)	21405 (3.9)	36444 (6.4)	-58081 (-9.6)
Other deposits with RBI	46136	1414 (3.2)	16437 (55.3)	-2043 (-6.4)	7629 (19.8)	2817 (13.4)	7835 (32.8)	6765 (21.3)
Sources								
Net RBI credit to Government	1179922	-134101 (-10.2)	235922 (25.0)	142049 (17.7)	187730 (18.9)	-144836 (-23.3)	325987 (68.5)	190241 (23.7)
of which: Centre	1172777	-137465 (-10.5)	230057 (24.4)	142247 (17.8)	183036 (18.5)	-145304 (-23.5)	326187 (68.8)	189268 (23.6)
RBI credit to banks & commercial sector	-322288	142735 (-30.7)	-322252 (895144.4)	-152887 (-100.0)	-121395 (60.4)	372643 (-120.5)	89478 (0.0)	-353744 (0.0)
Net foreign exchange assets of RBI	3708976	103365 (2.9)	773862 (26.4)	86527 (3.0)	118574 (3.3)	363571 (15.2)	87806 (3.2)	741815 (26.0)
Govt's currency liabilities to the public	26315	0 (0.0)	360 (1.4)	67 (0.3)	0 (0.0)	572 (2.3)	236 (0.9)	427 (1.6)
Net non-monetary liabilities of RBI	1461348	46617 (3.3)	356420 (32.3)	46133 (4.4)	83006 (6.0)	73650 (8.8)	151805 (16.7)	319547 (30.2)

■ Scheduled Commercial Banks' Indicators (₹ Crore)

(As on 22 May)	Outstanding 2020	Over Month	Over Year	Variation				
				2019-20	2020-21	2017-18	Financial Year	
Aggregate deposits	13830525	119840 (0.9)	1330967 (10.6)	-74214 (-0.6)	263033 (1.9)	668390 (6.2)	1147722 (10.0)	993720 (7.9)
Demand	1447222	-22007 (-1.5)	134133 (10.2)	-198198 (-13.1)	-169781 (-10.5)	88843 (6.9)	141004 (10.3)	105716 (7.0)
Time	12383303	141847 (1.2)	1196835 (10.7)	123984 (1.1)	432814 (3.6)	579547 (6.1)	1006717 (10.0)	888005 (8.0)
Cash in hand	87881	310 (0.4)	10459 (13.5)	2546 (3.4)	621 (0.7)	-1295 (-2.1)	14811 (24.7)	12384 (16.5)
Balance with RBI	433987	10256 (2.4)	-64208 (-12.9)	-67512 (-11.9)	-102199 (-19.1)	16906 (3.3)	40021 (7.6)	-29521 (-5.2)
Investments	4054375	84504 (2.1)	532475 (15.1)	140844 (4.2)	360805 (9.8)	287494 (9.5)	62602 (1.9)	312514 (9.2)
of which: Government securities	4052647	84069 (2.1)	532676 (15.1)	140969 (4.2)	367730 (10.0)	287657 (9.5)	61595 (1.9)	305915 (9.1)
Bank credit	10223150	-46108 (-0.4)	601605 (6.3)	-150177 (-1.5)	-147711 (-1.4)	783965 (10.0)	1146297 (13.3)	599139 (6.1)
of which: Non-food credit	10143734	-72881 (-0.7)	587911 (6.2)	-174289 (-1.8)	-175363 (-1.7)	795906 (10.2)	1146676 (13.4)	588985 (6.1)

■ Capital Markets

	5 June 2020	Month Ago	Year Ago	Financial Year So Far		2019-20		End of Financial Year		
				Trough	Peak	Trough	Peak	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
S&P BSE SENSEX (Base: 1978-79=100)	34287 (-14.5)	31454	40084 (14.8)	27591	34287	25981	41953	32969 (11.1)	39714.20 (12.4)	29816 (-21.8)
S&P BSE-100 (Base: 1983-84=100)	10252 (-15.6)	9305	12145 (11.7)	8180	10252	7683	12456	10503 (11.5)	12044.07 (9.1)	8693 (-25.2)
S&P BSE-200 (1989-90=100)	4276 (-15.0)	3880	5028 (10.0)	3416	4276	3209	5185	4433 (12.0)	4986.55 (7.1)	3614 (-25.1)
CNX Nifty-50 (Base: 3 Nov 1995=1000)	10142 (-15.6)	9206	12022 (13.5)	8084	10142	7610	12362	10114 (11.0)	11922.80 (11.1)	8660 (-24.3)
CNX Nifty-500	8299 (-16.0)	7523	9876 (8.4)	6638	8299	6243	10119	8912 (12.6)	9805.05 (5.3)	7003 (-26.3)

Figures in brackets are percentage variations over the specified or over the comparable period of the previous year. | (-) = not relevant | - = not available | NS = new series | PE = provisional estimates

■ Comprehensive current economic statistics with regular weekly updates are available at: <http://www.epwrf.in/currentstat.aspx>.

Fish for an Island

Studying how major climatic events are affecting the ecology of coral reef systems, a marine biologist reflects on what this means for communities whose lives are intertwined with the ecology.

SHREYA YADAV

Nadia walked briskly up to me, her hands full of food containers. “You wanted short-eats, no?” she asked as she led me to the group of women who were waiting close by. Earlier in the day while interviewing her, I had asked her about recipes for Maldivian short-eats, fried tuna-filled snacks that often accompany their morning or evening coffee. The women had just returned from a meeting at the school with plenty of leftovers, so we made our way to one of their homes. Inside, Nadia arranged a plate of *gulha*, samosa, and *boakiba* in front of me, and poured me a glass of juice. Three other women—all part of the Women’s Development Committee on this island of Rinbudhoo—stood around the table, giggling at my obvious pleasure. These were all snacks Nadia had prepared at home, which she often shipped to Malé or sold to tourists. Her *boakiba* (fish cake) was fantastic, spicy and dense, but not heavy.

A few minutes later, we heard that the boat that had gone out that afternoon was just pulling into the lagoon. The previous day, my collaborator Fisam and I had been told that we should try to make it out to see the catch of frigate tuna when it was landed the next evening. “You have to go fast!” Nadia said, motioning for me to finish eating quickly. Fisam and I made our way to the beach on the island’s north-eastern edge, the sand a muted pink and orange in the late light of the setting sun.

Rinbudhoo is one of the six inhabited islands in Dhaalu atoll in central Maldives. The 26 atolls of the Maldives are made up of individual islands, “uncut emeralds in a sea of sapphire” as T W Hockley, a visiting British official, wrote in 1935. Its waters are vast, home to 3% of the world’s coral reefs. Fishing and fisheries are central to the culture and economy here. I was there for my doctoral research, trying to understand how the ecology of these coral reef systems is changing in response to major climatic disturbances like coral-bleaching events. But in the past few years, I have been drawn to the dynamics playing out on land, and to exploring the ties between people and their reefs. Fisam and I were here to conduct a pilot study on the values—both monetary and cultural—that people had for different species of fish, and whether those were changing. Some studies in ecology happen far from humans, but on islands like these, things are necessarily more intertwined. I was coming to appreciate that.

We walked up to the beach where the *dhoani* had just pulled up onto the sand. Dusk was setting in as the catch began to be offloaded. Handfuls of tuna were thrown from the bowels of

the boat onto the beach, forming a grey-black heap where they landed. Someone then sorted them into a different pile, tallying the count with one fish thrown to the side for every hundred counted. The fish just keep coming: 300, 500, and then 1,000 fish glittered under the singular lamp illuminating the scene. A small crowd had gathered by this time and, as the counting neared its end, wheelbarrows were brought out to further separate the catch. The call for evening prayer came and went. People sat at the water’s edge, gutting and cleaning the tuna. Entrails and viscera were buried in the sand, and the fish were rinsed in seawater. An eagle ray, smelling the blood, hovered close to the boat. A total of 1,565 fish were caught that day, and the catch was distributed to everyone on the island. Much of it would be boiled in homes to make *rihakuru*, a fish paste that is often eaten with rice. Some of it would be dried or smoked.

This way, the fish would keep for long, and could be used for months after. Pieces of this smoked fish are what made Nadia’s *boakiba* so delicious.

A community fishing day like this is not a rare event, but it is certainly not common practice on the islands anymore. For a few days around the time of the full moon, frigate tuna enter the lagoons of some islands in large numbers, likely a seasonal response to the availability of prey fish in these waters. For a large catch to be landed, a collective effort is required.

Someone brings the boat, and a handful of fishers bring their nets. In Rinbudhoo, on this particular day, around 20 fishers had gone out together. The fish were not for selling—all of it was shared. Done every month, or every other month for a part of the year, fishing days like this fed everyone on the island.

But how much longer would a practice like this last? Most islands in the Maldives now have a harbour, continuously being developed and expanded so that larger boats can dock there. The dredging that results from this, along with other coastal development projects, has an impact on the abundance of fish inside lagoons. The offshore tuna fishery for skipjack and yellowfin tuna also requires live bait that is fished in lagoons or on reefs near islands. Some fishers on other islands told us how they thought that unsustainable levels of bait fishing, combined with the effects of dredging, was why they didn’t see frigate tuna near their islands anymore. “If there are no fish for the frigate tuna to eat, why would they come here?” one of them asked.

An elderly reef fisher we spoke to told us how, in the past, people never fished out juvenile bait fish inside the lagoon. It was important to leave them in the water to ensure their population remained healthy. Now, he said, people fish for bait throughout

Some studies in ecology happen far from humans, but on islands like these, things are necessarily more intertwined. I was coming to appreciate that

the year, and more intensively than before. While there is some national monitoring of the live bait fishery, fishers told us repeatedly how a greater effort was required to catch bait fish today. This has led to people diving for bait or using bright lights to attract schools to the surface at night—practices that can have serious repercussions in the long run if they're not managed.

What would change if community-wide fishing days were no longer practised, though? If a bigger harbour brought more boats, more tourists, more revenue, were fishing days a small price to pay? To whom did it matter, anyway, and what purpose did it serve? I couldn't help but think of a colleague's research in the Nicobar Islands, where hasty government aid and rehabilitation programmes after the tsunami of 2004 had radically altered previously isolated Nicobarese societies, affecting the structure of their households, fisheries management, and resource use. In particular, post-tsunami policies had overlooked Nicobarese traditions of sharing and collective ownership, and eroded customary practices by not being cognisant of the role they played in those communities.

Often, the value of a certain practice is difficult to quantify and understand until it is no longer performed, and every other practice or process it's linked to suddenly becomes more vulnerable. In our surveys across these islands, Fisam and I noticed just how much things had changed, both on land and in the water, as islands were reclaimed and expanded. Would Nadia still make and sell her boakiba if she had to buy her tuna? Would people simply switch to fishing for another species, if frigate tuna no longer entered these waters? Perhaps, some of these changes were inevitable. But tonight, at least, the air was thick with the smell of rihakuru, and we would all eat well tomorrow.

[Images accompanying this article are available on the EPW website.]

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Reading *A Journal of the Plague Year* during the Lockdown

There are striking similarities between the Great Plague of London and the COVID-19 pandemic—in Daniel Defoe's historical fiction, we see literature's power to vividly capture human behaviour in times of crisis.

SUNIL MACWAN

Recently, rearranging the books at home, I was thrilled to find Daniel Defoe's historical novel *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). It was a serendipitous discovery of a book that describes the horrors of the Great

Plague of London in 1665. Holed up at home, besieged by uncertainty and fear, reading this novel has given me a fresh perspective on the power of fiction to tell life's timeless truths. When Defoe began writing the *Journal* around 1709, his main intention was to warn the people of England against the next bout of plague from the Continent. Little did he know that his words would ring true even after three centuries. The reality Defoe portrays in his novel seems to have revisited the globe in 2020. Reflecting on it critically might teach us important lessons for the future.

The narrator begins by mentioning that the plague had returned to Holland in September 1664. As for its origins, he notes, "some said from Italy, others from the Levant ... others said it was brought from Candia; others from Cyprus." No one knew exactly from where it came, but everyone agreed that it had come from "somewhere" outside the country. In the case of the novel coronavirus, too, neither Italy, nor Spain, nor the United States (us) has definitively traced the virus's origin, even though all fingers point at China. Any virus needs a carrier to move around, and those infected with it inadvertently spread it across the world. Therefore, human interaction, whether local or global, is still at the heart of epidemics and pandemics.

Defoe makes interesting observations about the civil authorities' inattention to the plague at the beginning of the London outbreak. "The Government had a true Account of it, and several Counsels were held about Ways to prevent its coming over; but all was kept very private. Hence it was, that this Rumour died off again, and People began to forget it." Has not history repeated itself in many a government's initial dismissive response to the novel coronavirus in 2020? As the pandemic was beginning to spread its tentacles across the world, Italy and Spain carried on with football matches, the us completely pooh-pooed it, and India delayed a nationwide response prioritising political affairs. Frighteningly, political powers even today—months after the world has gone into lockdown—continue to take a myopic view of impending global catastrophes.

The suffering of the poor as recorded by the *Journal's* narrator is not just heart-wrenching but also painfully similar to the plight of migrants during the lockdown in India. Describing the thousands of desperate people fleeing London by whatever means they could find, Defoe writes, "Indeed nothing was to be seen but waggons and carts, with goods, women, servants, children ... innumerable numbers of men on horseback, some alone, others with servants, and generally speaking, all loaded with baggage and fitted out for travelling, as any one might perceive by their appearance." As the complete lockdown was abruptly

Just as the poor bore the brunt of the London epidemic in 1665, the poor are paying the heaviest price of the COVID-19 pandemic in India in 2020

announced and enforced overnight in India, thousands of men, women, and children also fled big cities to save their lives both from the invisible virus and inevitable starvation. Just as the poor bore the brunt of the London epidemic in 1665, the poor are paying the heaviest price of the COVID-19 pandemic in India in 2020. As their meagre resources and savings keep depleting, the poor and marginalised are barely surviving.

Human beings think they have answers to most questions life throws at them—at least, that's what those who claim to have miraculous, supernatural powers believe. During the London Plague, as Defoe notes, dozens of quacks, healers, and fortune tellers emerged in swarms from the woodwork, conning people out of the little money they had by giving them the false hope of miraculous cure or escape from the plague. With disdain, the narrator notes, "With what blind, absurd, and ridiculous Stuff, these Oracles of the Devil pleas'd and satisfy'd the People, I really know not; but certain it is, that innumerable Attendants crowd'd about their Doors every Day ... I need not mention..., what a horrid Delusion this was, or what it tended to; but there was no Remedy for it, till the Plague it self put an End to it all; and I suppose, clear'd the Town of most of those Calculators themselves." In our time, too, quacks, godmen, and faith-healers initially claimed to save people from the novel coronavirus, one way or another. However, within days they shut shop and went cowering for cover to remain uninfected by the deadly virus against which their miraculous powers were found shockingly ineffective.

During the plague, though, most people found some peace and hope in religion. When everything else had failed, the plague-stricken Londoners turned to god for reassurance. According to the *Journal's* narrator, thousands turned to god to find spiritual strength in prayer: "The People shew'd an extraordinary Zeal in these religious Exercises and as the Church Doors were always open, People would go in single at all Times ... locking themselves into separate Pews, would be praying to God with great Fervency and Devotion." One aspect of India's collective response to the pandemic is increased religiosity. People of all religions have called upon gods for protection, healing, and safety in many different ways and means these days. Religious television serials, online prayers, personal devotion, prayer, and fasting are some noticeable markers of people's undiluted faith in religion and spirituality as the cure for their material woes. Fiction shows that some human tendencies have not changed for centuries. They might not for many more to come.

Novels such as Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*—as well as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and Albert Camus's *La Peste* (*The Plague*, 1947)—are written not only as an account of the horrors of plagues but also to enthral people with hair-raising stories of human suffering, endurance, and triumph. Reading the *Journal* in the midst of this pandemic, staring at

the face of an unnerving, uncertain future reminded me of my own mortality, feebleness, and insignificance in the grand scheme of things called life. Fortunately, though, it also made me aware of the power of fiction to make that life more meaningful, instructive, and valuable.

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Indian Global Cinema and the People's History

Is contemporary Indian cinema doing the job of recording the people's history of our times?

DEVASHISH MAKHIJA

Like all storytellers are wont to do, I will start with a story. A little over 10 years ago, troubled at not being able to fully comprehend the Adivasi-Naxalite-mining-development conflict situation through mere research, I undertook a journey to north Andhra Pradesh and south Odisha. That was also the time when the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was being implemented enthusiastically across rural India. We came across many roads being constructed under this scheme in the Adivasi areas where there had been none. And, often, it was the Adivasis displaced from their own lands who were employed as daily wage labourers to build the very roads they were displaced for.

The government claimed they were ensuring employment under this scheme so that those displaced could get a basic minimum wage to be able to buy the food and essentials they needed every day. Imagine an Adivasi on their own land, growing their own food, filling their own water from the river, weaving their own clothes, needing to buy nothing to survive. Now imagine that same Adivasi without their land, living far away from it in tin-sheet shanties, having to now buy food and clothing, and sometimes even water.

In those times, the government's daily wage for each labourer was ₹250. I was lucky to get a peek at one of the registers that the private contractor in charge of the road laying scheme in one such area had maintained. It had columns for name, gender, taluka, village, date, attendance, payment and signature. This was the only resource that the local government representatives would use to update the massive MGNREGA government database online.

The contractor had left the "payment" column empty as he paid out the wages—a 100 rupee note to each labourer—dutifully taking their thumbprints in the signature column. The remaining ₹150 simply disappeared into the ether even as I watched. I tried to object. But the labourers were silent.

The poor and deprived, when desperate, do not prioritise fairness and justice over a square meal.

Did the government even send ₹250 per labourer? Or did the entities that come in between the government and the labourer whisk it away? Every time someone questioned the government about the effectiveness of MGNREGA, its records showed that each labourer was paid the full amount. The “system,” therefore, has proof. It has evidence. It has witness. Because it has precise and undeniable documentation.

But there is no record of the fact that those labourers received only ₹100 each. Where does one record that? How will that be testified for? Who will bear witness for it? Because when one turns to the judiciary to fight for something, only evidence and proof matter.

In sum, the state’s perspective has it all. The people’s perspective has none. A system that does not allow for the people to be heard and represented and spoken for is a system that must be rejected, questioned, and overhauled. The records that such a system keeps must be rejected as well because there is no counter to it. And with no formal counter-perspective available, the only informal way to record it, is in “stories.”

The only thing that survives intact and unblemished once a generation dies is the art that was created in their time. All traces of the people’s perspective can be whitewashed from textbooks and history books and museums, and even YouTube, if a regime with contrary ideas comes to power.

If you wanted to see the partition of India today through a humanistic—and not simply a political, geographical or demographic—lens, what would you reach for? Literature. And within literature, most of us would reach for Saadat Hasan Manto’s stories. Manto was not documenting fact. He was not a government employee, nor was he a journalist. He was not an anthropologist. He was not of any political party. He wrote fiction. But he focused unflinchingly on the people’s perspective—that other perspective, which no formal entity ever documents. His stories move people; they start conversations.

Today, it is cinema that can do that job—if it wishes to, that is. In the parallel cinema movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, this was done with efficiency and passion by Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Saeed Mirza, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Mrinal Sen, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, M S Sathyu, and so many others. Unfortunately, this enterprise nearly disappeared by the 1990s—perhaps liberalisation washed it all away in the sudden flash flood of global entertainment.

If it wants, contemporary Indian global cinema can record, for posterity, a people’s history of today’s times. But, unlike 40 years ago, those doing this are too few now. Chaitanya

Tamhane’s *Court* (2014), Nagraj Manjule’s *Fandry* (2013), Sanal Sasidharan’s *Sexy Durga* (2017), and Anusha Rizvi’s *Peepli Live* (2010) come to mind. These films place front and centre those Indians living on the margins of the informal and illegal in a country slowly crumbling on the grounds of caste (*Court* and *Fandry*), gender (*Sexy Durga*), and urban bias (*Peepli Live*).

We are at a point in modern history where all we have around us is the state’s narrative and what it wants us to believe. More than ever before, we need our art, our stories, and mostly our cinema, to aggressively seek out, nurture, shape, and exhibit the people’s narratives to ourselves and the world. Major international film festivals seek and reward the films that do this. There is a smell of authenticity and uniqueness to our cinema when it turns its lens fiercely on local truths. And the discerning global viewer catches it and cherishes it. But it’s becoming increasingly difficult to find any sort of resources to keep seeking and presenting such stories in a medium that needs money to sustain it. Because money, by its very nature, is drawn towards authority and power, both of which have always been contrarian to the people’s perspective of things. More so, today.

I leave us with some words from Howard Zinn, who implanted the idea of a people’s perspective in my own work.

A poem can inspire a movement. A pamphlet can spark a revolution. Civil disobedience can arouse people ... when we organize with one another, when we get involved, when we stand up and speak out together, we can create a power no government can suppress.

If politicians, corporate executives, and owners of press and television can dominate our ideas, they will be secure in their power. They will not need soldiers patrolling the streets. We will control ourselves.

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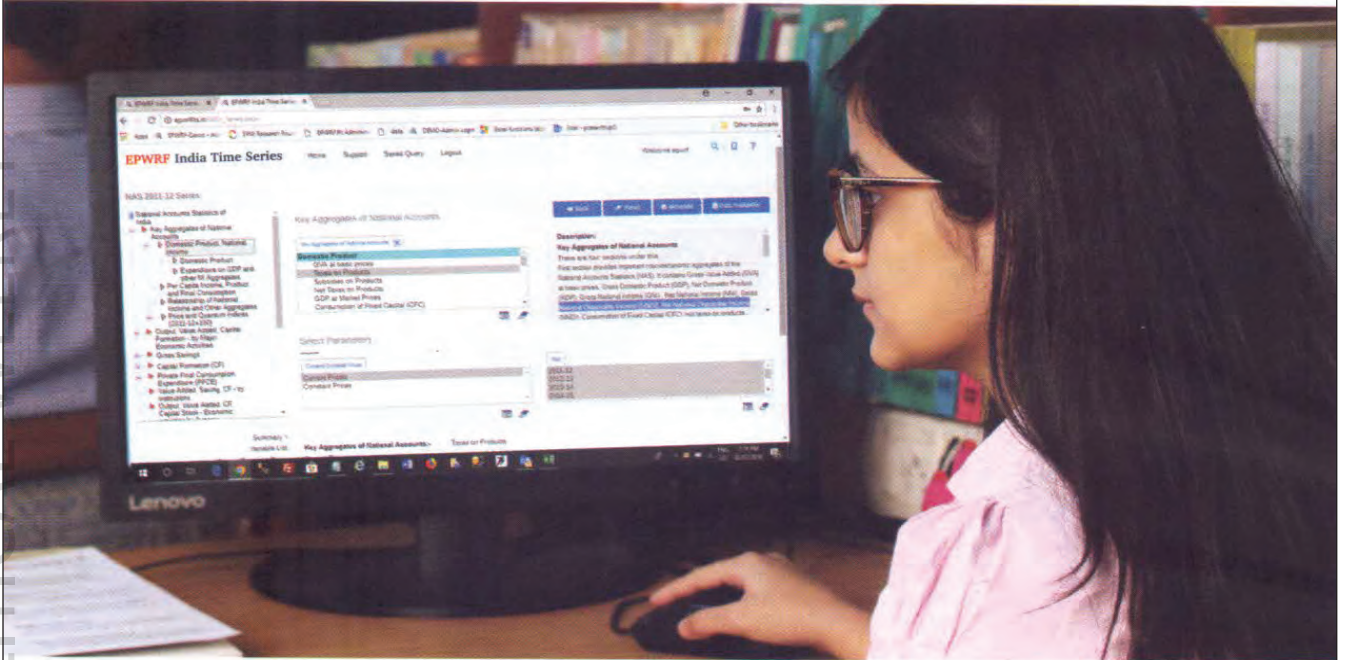
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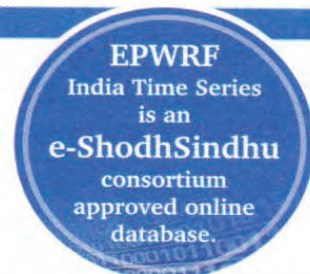


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