SACH

South Asian Composite Heritage

ISSUE NO. 59 ■ JULY-SEPTEMBER 2020

Covid-19 : Learning from Aftermath and Making of New Normal

THE Covid pandemic has already landed a blow on the global economy; it has pushed the countries to the edge of another downturn in modern human history. South Asian countries have taken a major fall due to the pandemic and moving ahead with the new normal.

It's not that countries are struggling with the fall of the economy only but other socio-political challenges have also emerged in a large scale. Covid-19 along with other adverse events such as natural disasters and tension with neighboring countries has impacted various communities of South Asian countries. In India ancient tradition and modern-day enforcement have prevented lower class and caste communities to access resources, the deeply embedded prejudices have impeded the delivery of healthcare to minorities. In Bangladesh; recent floods have done worst to millions of people, who were already impacted by COVID-19 and they were pushed further into poverty. In Nepal due to Covid-19 marginalized communities especially women have suffered a lot, the violence against women has been recorded high. The deteriorating situation of education in Afghanistan has become worst. In comparison to other communities, the indigenous community of Bangladesh was hit hardest by the socioeconomic impacts of the Covid-19.The epidemic has intensified their life struggles, where women are at greater risk and they all are facing crisis of drinking water along with food shortage.

One cannot say that countries have faced crises and have not learned from it. Stories suggest that for some people, with the closure of physical space, there has been the opening of spaces of another kind. In different societies such as in university and institutions, the crises have been accepted as the new normal. It has provided a virtual liberation to the people, the connection with community through technology has been seen as the end of the distance. People from art and literature too are responding to the disease in different ways. Pakistani poets have profusely responded to the situation. They have given us poetry on various issues which shows that they are the witness to a significant human history. Hence we believe that one cannot ignore the aftermath of this pandemic but can only understand the crisis and learn from it. We only need to analyse the situation and seek the new normal in positivity.

The Special Ghost

By **SANDHYA SHANKAR,** INDIA

You may look at me every day,
Yet, you might not see who I really am.
My shriek can be heard at night,
But not my voice when spoken.
I pick up and move things around whole day,
Though, everyone is too busy to notice.
I run from one place to another,
Silently, better than a cat can ever do.
I can be in many places at once,
My hands stretching out to grasp things.
Most of the time, I excel at being invisible,
Unless, when I fumble a bit, which leads to a commotion.
Some say I can manipulate the thoughts of others,
But am cursed to bury my own wishes.
Burns don't stop me from playing with fire,
Still, I am not considered dangerous.
You see, I am a special ghost,
Different from the ones in the stories you have heard.
I don't scare other people,
Rather remain meek myself.
However, like them, I too don't rest, for that is human.
So, who am I? I am that special ghost who remains hidden,
In the very shadows of the home that I help to create.

Courtesy: livewire.thewire.in

How COVID-19 Replaced Rituals of Mourning With a Solitary Grief

By **SOMYA LAKHANI AND TORA AGARWALA**, INDIA

COULD she be really gone?" It is something Guwahati-based Lonie Chaliha, a retired school teacher in her sixties, finds herself wondering months after her sister, Julie Dutta died. In the last five years that Julie battled cancer in Kolkata, Lonie was a constant source of comfort. "We were close in a way only sisters can be: we would talk every night, we would share everything," she says. Every time Julie underwent a major chemotherapy procedure, her sister would fly down to Kolkata. This March was no different. Julie, also in her sixties, had undergone a procedure and Lonie was with her sister. "But mid-March I came back to Guwahati to sort out some work, thinking I would go back in a few days," she says.

Then came a pandemic, a lockdown, and a piece of news she was barely prepared for: her sister passed away on the morning of April 6, her husband by her side. When her other brother had died of an illness in 2008, Lonie remembers how starkly different that experience was. "Death in our culture is rarely quiet. Everyone visited, we could share our grief, we could remember the good times with him. In normal times, it would have been a similar farewell to Julie, too, but all I saw were photographs of four people taking her away to a crematorium." The sight saddened her even more because the vivacious, stylish and sophisticated Julie simply loved being around people. A small shraadh was held at Julie's home in Kolkata, with only her husband and the priest in attendance.

As the days go by, Lonie says, instead of ebbing, the grief has become more severe, more painful, and sometimes, even punitive. Questions plague her most in the quiet of the night, when everyone has gone to sleep, just around the time she would usually get a call from Julie, and she would say, in her signature singsong style, "Ki koriso, Lonz? (What are you doing?)"

Echoes of Chaliha's distress can be heard in a village in Bihar's Begusarai, inside a house in Canada, in Mumbai's Dharavi, in a busy home in south Delhi — and in countless other homes grappling with solitary grief. With the fear of transmission of the coronavirus and social distancing protocols, mourning is no longer the community experience it always has been. Children have been unable to attend the last rites of a parent, families have had to watch a loved one's funeral on WhatsApp video calls, an ageing mother was unable to console her young daughter who lost her husband — these are not stories of resilience thrown up by the pandemic, but instances of unimaginable grief boxed in a room. "Being consoled is an important stage of grief and, in the last few months, in many cases, that stage is being skipped," says Delhi-based clinical psychologist Sarika Boora.

The last time Surinder Jeet Kaur, assistant commissioner of Delhi Police, spoke to her husband was the day before he was put on

ventilator for COVID-19 related respiratory illness on May 22. He sent Surinder a series of WhatsApp messages about their bank details, and told her he was having difficulty breathing over a video call. That was also the last time Surinder saw her husband. He died 23 days later.

Two months on, Surinder is stricken by the fact that she could not give him a befitting farewell. "We bathe our beloved, make them wear new clothes, put some Gangajal in their mouth. I didn't even get to see his face. He was a good man, he deserved more," says Surinder. Nor could her 26-year-old son attend the funeral. He watched his mother perform the last rites from a relative's home in Vancouver, Canada. "What can be more painful than losing my partner of 28 years and not even having our son to hold and cry?" says Surinder.

The virtual "last rites" ceremony, says Bhavna Barmi, a Delhi-based clinical psychologist, does not help someone accept reality with conviction. "The lack of social support can also lead to intensification of sadness," she says.

Some families were even more unfortunate. "When my brother-in-law passed away in Kolkata, the hospital told his wife that there is a queue for cremations and that 'inka number aayega.' His body was kept in a morgue. Two days later at 8 am, the hospital called and said that he had been cremated at 3 am. The family didn't even get to see his face," says Mumbai-based journalist Sohini Mitter.

In June, when Delhi witnessed a spike in coronavirus cases, packed ambulances and rushed farewells were the norm at crematoriums. At the Dayanand Muktidham Cremation Ground and Electric Crematorium in south Delhi, urns of ashes still lie in the storeroom — awaiting the return of children of the deceased from faraway countries. Dharamveer, 32, a priest at the crematorium, says he had never seen such sights before. "I see relatives in PPE kits crying alone, standing apart, unable to hold each other. Earlier, 50-100 people would come for the cremation, now the number is down to five or 10 because of the rules," he says. Both Penzy Morgan, the caretaker of the Indian Christian Cemetery in Delhi's Paharganj, and Haji Kallu of the Hauz Rani Kabristan in the city narrated similar stories — of hesitation at graveyards and fewer family members. Kallu said, "In the last 50 years, I have never seen such a change in how we mourn the dead. It's sad to see such small farewells, to know that people are hesitant to meet each other, of saying goodbye… Yeh virus kaisa samay leke aaya hai? (What times has this virus brought?)"

Even at 92, Anand Mohan Zutshi Gulzar Dehlvi was the life of mushairas in Delhi, and a roaring applause followed every time he read a nazm. In June, when he passed away at his Greater Noida home — a week after recovering from COVID-19 — it was truly the end of an era. "Had it been ordinary times, there would have been thousands of people at his last rites… family, friends, neighbours, fans of his work. But only 10 came because of the prevailing situation. My wife and children were in Pune, my sister was in the US, and throngs of Papa's fans watched it on Facebook," says the poet's son Anoop Zutshi. "Since it was just mom and I, there was no solace, no one to hold our hands or hug us," he says.

In two decades of living in Aizawl's Chawlhhmun locality, Margaret Zama, a professor of English from the Mizoram University, says she has never missed a single funeral. But since the lockdown, she hasn't attended even one — completely unheard of. Because death in Mizoram is rarely a private affair. "Mizo funerals are not just attended by relatives, friends and acquaintances but by complete strangers too," says Zama. When someone dies in Mizoram, loudspeaker announcements (tlangau) are made to inform the entire locality and the Young Mizo Association (YMA) — the most influential organisation in the state — swings into action to make arrangements for the funeral. Everyone in the neighbourhood participates, whether it is to build a coffin, dig the grave, cook for the family, or sit together and sing funeral songs through the night. In the post-COVID world, the funerals are shorter and only a few participate — rituals have been cut short or done away with.

When his father died in 2014, Kima a blogger and software developer from Aizawl, recalls how the entire neighbourhood showed up to carry out the customary practices — one of which involved offering to sleep over at the deceased's house to give the family company. At a recent funeral, Kima saw the stark,

unsettling difference. "There were few people, everyone wore masks, everyone stood far away from each other," he says.

For most of the families, death in the time of the coronavirus already compounds a time of great tragedy. In May, a PTI photo of 40-year-old Ram Pukar Pandit sobbing at the Delhi-UP border went viral, as the Begusarai resident, overwhelmed by the news of his infant son's death, struggled to return home. He finally made it home, but not in time for the funeral. The family did organise a small puja at home when he reached. Even now, he regrets that he doesn't have a single photograph of his nine-month-old baby. Every time he thinks of his little boy, memories of a video call from Begusarai to Delhi, when the baby was born in 2019, float back to him. "I never met my son, I wasn't here when he was born. I couldn't visit home because I had to earn money, and I couldn't make it back in time for his last rites either. Every time I think of him, I feel like I will go mad," says Pandit. More sorrow befell the already struggling family. "Before she could even get over the loss of our child, my wife lost her father to prolonged illness. The lockdown is strict here, we are unable to meet any family… Dukh itna hai jaise chhaati pe chattaan rakh diya hai kisi ne. Upar se kaam kuch nahi hai, na paisa (I feel like I am being crushed by grief. On top of that, there is no work or money)," he says, over the phone from his village.

In Kerala, 22-year-old Akhil, son of nursing officer Ambika PK who died of COVID-19 in May in Delhi, has "reserved his nights for sadness" and worrying about how the loss is affecting his younger sister. The days are for arranging insurance paperwork and other chores. "I don't have the time to be sad… Only at night, maybe, when all the work is done. I have recurring nightmares, very bad dreams of being alone in a forest or watching death… Then there is news of a landslide, a plane crash, increasing deaths…"

As mortality becomes a daily graph to be reckoned with, the lives and deaths of others add up to a collective grief — without a catharsis. Boora says that a lot of her clients, too, are "in turmoil because of … news of tragedies and deaths on TV. The loss of a loved one is accompanied by other drastic changes such as loss of job, reduced salaries, strained relationships due to lockdown, and worrying news from across the world."

A 36-year-old doctor at the Safdarjung hospital in Delhi, who has been on COVID-19 duty every month for two weeks since March, says that the medical fraternity is "stewing in collective sadness." "When cases were peaking in the city, we felt a sense of helplessness, especially in the ICU. Since family members can't meet patients, we often were the route through which they last spoke to their loved ones. It was traumatising . . . Apart from deaths of patients, we lost colleagues, family members or friends to COVID-19 and other ailments," he says.

Some are trying to move on, through self-devised routines. Sohrab Farooqui, 26, a hotel management student in Mumbai's Dharavi, has focussed all his energies on working out and exercise, after his mother passed away due to Covid-19 in April. "She died due to negligence, no help reached her in time. I am so angry, I am hurt, I am broken… Maa ke jaane ke baad kuch nahi bacha. I have suppressed my anger by working out. It helps me. I also visit her grave every Thursday," he says.

Akhil is wrenched by the thought of losing his sister. He says, "She doesn't talk to me, maybe she blames me… My mother and sister wanted me to stay back in Delhi when I visited in February but I didn't. Her nature has also changed, she talks less ever since mother passed away. I didn't know I would undergo such grief at such a young age. No one taught me how to deal with it."

It is this lesson that Dr Heena Ali is struggling to broach with her children after their father — Dr Javed Ali, a government doctor in Delhi — died in July, while treating COVID-19 patients since March. "My six-year-old son thinks his father is at his grandfather's house so he calls him every day and asks him to return Papa… I have noticed that my daughter, who is older, understands that her father is no more. She has immersed herself in studies. This is her response to grief. They are the ones consoling me," says Dr Heena. "As for me, yeh zakhm zindagi bhar ka hai (this is a wound for life) . . . I can't even describe my pain to you, I can only feel it."

Courtesy: indianexpress.com

Nepal- In the Midst of COVID-19

By **SUSAN RISAL,** NEPAL

THE devastating situation of COVID -19 has instilled the profound impact among the marginalized communities and especially among the women. The visible impact that we observe during this pandemic are, especially in the aspects of economic hardships, physical security, psychological security and food security of these groups due to the loss of daily income of their family members & themselves as well as huge rise in domestic violence in the period of complete lockdown. Almost 40 % of women have lost their income opportunity during this lockdown which will once again have a greater impact on rising of the domestic violence, child marriages and loss of opportunity of education of girl child. Similarly the reproductive health of women is also in a risk due to forced pregnancy, lack of accessing contraceptives materials and poor management of quarantines which is not gender friendly as well not secure where we also heard the rape cases in quarantine centers. In addition the pregnant mothers are also in huge risks. In the past Nepal has remarkably achieved in reducing the mortality rate of pregnant mother whereas in this context of COVID- 19 the mortality rate of women has increased to 35 % compare to past years. During this period of lockdown only at the time of writing of this article 89 women has lost their lives due to difficulty in accessing the hospital services as well as fear of going there.

Many daily wages workers who were resided in Kathmandu and big cities are compelled to return to their hometown as they couldn't afford to sustain them there. Similarly many migrant workers from Gulf countries are returning back to Nepal and going back to their villages. Due to fear of corona virus these people who returned to their villages were not welcomed by their community. This move has contributed in destabilizing the social fabric of the communities due to huge stigma around the people with corona virus. In this regard the notion of othering is rising among the communities. The communities which were living in a harmony have now begun to develop the notion of suspicion and fear among each other and have raised the hatred among each other. The medical persons, health workers and the security personnel who used to stay in a rented house are being stopped to enter into their apartment after their duties by landlord and their communities due to the fear of spreading the corona virus. It seems like the entire community is losing their humanity, humility and wisdom.

We need to analyze why this happening? The major reason behind to this multifaceted problem is: Nepal has never invested its efforts in addressing the structural inequalities, violence, existing impunities, atrocities and human right violation in the past. And now once again the situation of COVID-19 has contributed in exacerbating the preexisting inequality, gender discrimination and violence against women which is being legitimized as well in the name of urgent need of response to corona virus. Once again we need to analyze whether the prevailing gender dimension will change, or deepen more or diluted in our coming future.

Continued to page 13

Covid-19 Measures are Crippling Afghan Education

By **NAZIR DAWI** AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN already has one of the worst literacy rates in the world and the new pandemic restrictions, which have kept about ten million students from classrooms, have started to reverse the country's hard-won educational achievements made in the past 18 years. In the long run, such a gigantic backslide in education will be catastrophic for the country's development prospects.

While the government continues to pay the salaries of over 150,000 teachers and administrators at public schools, it has offered no assistance or support for private schools and universities.

As the administrator of an elementary private school in Kabul, I find the government's total lack of support to our school devastating. While we charge no fees when school is closed and have no other revenue source, we are contractually obligated to pay our rents on time. Our teachers receive no salary. We also have to pay utility bills.

I founded an educational institute in 2012 and an elementary school in Kabul in 2018 not for profit, but to help provide quality education to our community and to fight our biggest national problem: illiteracy. In our school, we also enroll children from some of the poorest families who otherwise cannot attend public schools. We take pride in the quality of our education, which we ceaselessly enhance in close collaboration with parents and community leaders. Unfortunately, I had to give up on the educational institute because I was not able to pay the rent.

Over the last three months, as schools were shutdown, I spoke with administrators from many other private schools in Kabul, Mazar, Herat and Kandahar. We all share the same fate and are seriously concerned that our schools are disintegrating fast and, as a result, our students will fail in their education.

Afghanistan has received more than $100 million in global assistance to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. The government has also allocated national resources to combat the pandemic. However, the government has offered no help or support to private educators and has left us entirely at the mercy of our landlords.

Private education is relatively new and fledging in Afghanistan, but it has already become a critical national sector with enormous impact on our socio-economic development.

Most Afghan children do not have the luxury of online education – something that might be available only for the kids of the rich and the powerful. The overwhelming majority of us are classified among the least developed people in the world and we have terrifying poverty indicators. Even before the pandemic lockdown was enforced, close to four million school-age Afghan children could not access education, according to aid agencies.

As the very existence of the private education sector is under threat, we call on President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Vice President Amrullah Saleh to pay attention to this national emergency. We urge these leaders to help us, private educators, to quickly resolve our most critical problems.

Courtesy: tolonews.com

How the Pandemic Has Changed the Idea of University Literary Communities Dramatically

By **SAIKAT MAJUMDAR,** INDIA

A pandemic, the world has learned at a great cost, is a sickness on a jet plane. A sickness for our times in more senses than we can bear to think about, a sickness gifted by the elite to the poor, from the airports all the way to the shanties and the villages. When I was asked to write on university literary communities caught in the pandemic, my first thought was how the illness has transformed our bodies and minds – and our behaviour when we gather to talk and interact. And of course, the space where we do so.

Oddly enough, my mind immediately floated to an intriguing document shared with me by the organiser of an online lecture I did this August for a college in Delhi, "The Invention of Creative Writing." This was the transcript of chat messages shared by members of the audience present. It made me realise a new how a webinar flouted the unities of place and time.

VIRTUAL LIBERATION

First, it had audience from everywhere, from Rajasthan to Madhya Pradesh to Manipur, Mussoorie, Hong Kong, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and several other Indian states, far beyond the concentration of people from Delhi. Then there was the way the event was archived. The talk was recorded, yes, as offline lectures are also sometimes recorded and made available online. That was only expected here, but what was also

additionally archived was the cluster of comments, hellos, even jokes – such as the private chat comment sent to the organiser recalling "crimes" committed as hostel buddies a couple of decades ago! Now we had these too, and stored forever!

The webinar culture has altered the meaning of two things: a gathering, and the archive. A gathering of people and the archiving of work are important for many communities – as anyone who participates in literary festivals and bookshop events online these days knows equally well. But it is especially important in colleges and universities, which are what I call permanent-transient communities. They are permanent institutions with a significant transient population. That's a professorial predicament – we age amidst an ageless people – new students keep replacing the older ones who leave.

To an extent, the literature class goes on uninterrupted. I'm teaching an introductory class to a large group of first-year students this semester – a mandatory general education course called "Literature and the World." These are unfortunate newcomers whose first experience of college is the now infamous zoomester. But I'm struck by the lively movement in the chat boxes. Comments pile up, sometimes just "!" marks in a queue based on which I call on them to talk, and talk they do, strangely a lot more than what we usually see in a real-life classroom with freshers.

The virtual nature of the space or perhaps the comfort of their home study table seems to liberate them. There is the occasional struggle to get them to turn on their cameras – "When you switch your cameras off," one professor reportedly said, "You turn me off," before realising the gaffe – but that's a battle for another day!

THE END OF DISTANCE

On my part, I've become savvier with the whiteboard on zoom screenshare, which salvages my atrocious handwriting when I scribble on a physical whiteboard in a physical class. I hold office hours on Google Hangout; there are no days when I'm not on "campus," as there is no campus anymore. A few of the lectures are zoomed from Massachusetts by Anjali Prabhu, professor at Wellesley College, the institution which is collaborating with Ashoka on this course.

Writers whose work is discussed join our online classroom: Manjul Bajaj spoke to us from Gurgaon; I hope to hide her presence till our back-and-forth on her stories, but her zoom-square shows up on the screen and students are just a little more shy during their presentation – the author is dead, long live the author! Arundhathi Subramanium is scheduled to join us next month – from where? Madras, Bombay, New York? Does it really matter?

Literature – perhaps the humanities and imaginative social sciences in general – seem to work okay online; the lab sciences are a different ball game altogether. But while life in Sonepat may not seem like something to really miss, the students miss each other, late nights at the dhaba, gossip in the canteen, and, I'm sure, more sensory forms of mutual interaction. The sensory calls for a time-space unity. I need to be where you are, and the presence has to be tangible, with voice and sight (if not more) intersecting without the aid of technology. When you are forced to give that up, you gain the right over something else – communicating with those who were *never* part of your time-space unity.

As I write this from my home in Delhi's Vasant Vihar, someone in Hauz Khas is suddenly no different from someone in South Africa's Cape Town, making some allowance for time-zones. Generally, we have an active calendar of events with visiting writers and speakers,book-talks, workshops, collaborations with publishers, but the roster tends to be limited to whoever is passing through/based in the Delhi-NCR area. That equation's now delightfully messed up! The university's student literary society organises a conversation with Zoë Wicomb, the South-African writer based in Scotland, and nowhere during that vigorous conversation does she look sleep-deprived.

FALLING BARRIERS

This feels like the perfect time to launch the website for a transnational movement of literary activism, an initiative spearheaded by our colleague, Amit Chaudhuri. We just managed to sneak in the physical edition of the 5th symposium on this artistic-intellectual movement at the India International Centre in February, shortly before all life came to a standstill. Literaryactivism.com was fittingly launched this September in a panel zoomcussion, involving Charles Bernstein, Dayanita Singh, Simon During, Dubravka Ugrešiæ and Chaudhuri, who joined, respectively, from the Philadelphia, Delhi, Berlin, Amsterdam and Calcutta.

What news elsewhere? I asked my student research assistant Diya Isha, who's been "attending" college from her home in Kerala and doing a cartload of things for the

college newspaper, *The Edict*. Diya reaches out to various college literary societies, and WhatsApp, the 21st century's force of nature, emerges as king once again!

Vaishnavi Balakrishnan from the Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences told her about the "not-so-active WhatsApp group" for their literary club, which suddenly had to open its doors to the student body of the entire college on popular demand as they started to conduct events online, including "story-writing, poetry writing-haiku, article writing, TV series and movies quiz...an inter-college debate in English and Tamil."

As lives started to be confined with the onset of the pandemic, they were "overwhelmed by the response" as they quickly became flooded with entries. Clearly, like students in my zoomester class, a lot of people feel more free in participating events online than in physical space.

Kaustuv Bakshi, who teaches gender and sexuality studies in the English department at Jadavpur University, described an active culture of community lectures by different professors organised by the Arts Faculty Students' Union (AFSU), which are streamed on different social media platforms that opens up the events far beyond JU students.

"For example," he said, "I delivered a talk on "Queer Lives in Quarantine", while my other colleagues spoke on subjects as diverse as Mental Health Issues during the Pandemic to Wittgenstein and his Language Games under the series, entitled, Beyond the Classroom." Kaustuv has been particularly attentive to the challenges faced by sexual minorities under the pandemic, a subject on which he has spoken online for a range of higher education institutions across the nation.

ALTERED PERPETUALLY

Indeed, many have realised the closure of physical space as the opening up of wider spaces of another kind. "This is also an opportunity," said Kritika Dixit, who works with Lady Shri Ram College's print and blog magazine. She sees the option of expanding beyond college-centric events to reflect on their location within a larger national and international community. However, at the same time, she said that "it's also in our isolation that we hope to bring people together and keep the spirit of the college alive."

Some institutions were already structured as virtual communities even before the world tilted us in that direction. Just as Sal Khan emerges as the real Bhaijaan of home-learning for children worldwide, Indira Gandhi National Open University, which has done similar things for adults in India, steps on its act. Nandini Sahu, Professor and Director, School of Foreign Languages at IGNOU pointed out that "there are lakhs of viewers and downloads every single day" from their Gyankosh and IGNOU Mobile Apps. "And our SWAYAM and SWAYAMPRABHA channels," she added, referring to IGNOU's TV and radio initiatives, "and our Gyandarshan and Gyanvani channels became much more popular during the pandemic."

Crises of both destructive and transformative kinds – they come together more often than we realise – have periodically created technologies and modes of social belonging that have initiated radically new forms and literary communities. The cumulative effects of the 18th century European Enlightenment, the acceleration of capitalism, print culture and the rise of the middle-class caused orality and performance to make space for printed and bound forms like the novel. During another period of simultaneous crisis and transformation in the 20th century - during the crucial years between the two World Wars, the philosopher Walter Benjamin had wondered if the new methods of mechanical reproduction, such as photography and cinema, would come to devalue the original aura of an artistic work.

I feel what we are experiencing now is no less consequential. Our sense of community has been scrambled and realigned irreversibly. As a widely shared article by Nicholas Christakis in *The Economist* predicts, "we have a long and sorrowful way to go." But as it slowly tapers off and life returns to normal in baby steps, the meaning of socio-cultural belonging and a literary education would have shifted.

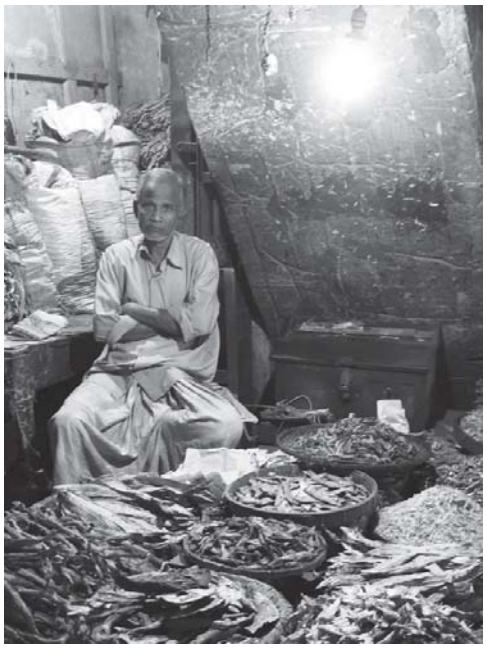
In his philosophical treatise, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Friedrich Schiller had argued that art is central to the development of the individual and society. While Schiller had placed his argument in the historical context of the French Revolution, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has refashioned Schiller's formulations in a more contemporary context, in her provocatively titled book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalization*. Now we have a dystopian medical twist to this aesthetic education, one which has clipped our (airplane) and recharged (online) wings at the same time. It is bound to perpetually alter out sense of literary community, nation, and the world.

Courtesy: Scroll.in

Corona Has made Double Struggle for Indigenous Peoples

By **NYOHLA MONG,** BANGLADESH

ALMOST all of us have a kind of common idea about the village. Some of the phrases like 'rural people are not educated and health-conscious' are also found in newspaper columns. We all identify the people of the villages in different ways, in different sentences. But if the people of the villages will ask, is everyone in the city educated and health-conscious? I don't know what would be the reply.



While the urban community is busy discussing the corona pandemic, I have seen on social media that indigenous villages have locked down themselves on their own. Several related reports were also published in the national daily regarding that. The lockdown practice is nothing new for Indigenous communities as this word is found in every Indigenous community, For example, in Marma community, they call it 'Pok-Chuk Bong' and in Mro they call it 'Khang'.

The food crisis in the hilly remote area is nothing new. In remote areas like Thanchi, Ruma, Baghaichhari, there is always a shortage of food at a certain period of the year. If the Jum Cultivation is not as expected, life in the remote area becomes more difficult. For those who lives in cities, it is almost impossible to think about it.

There are many remote areas where the cost of per kg rice for carrying (mainly head load) is 30-40 Taka. Therefore, apart from the district and Upazila headquarters, 15-20 kg of government-assisted rice has been distributed in other areas. According to a joint statement of the CHT Social Organizations, though the government has distributed rice in different communities yet they failed to provide it in an inclusive manner. As they mentioned that in 5 villages of Barathali Union under Bilaichhari, known as a remote Upazila, less than 2 kg of rice has been received per family. We can easily see that they had been deprived of the benefits of the 2500 TK package given by the Hon'ble Prime Minister because many marginalized families including Jum Cultivators living in the remote areas failed to fulfill the necessary conditions to avail PM package.

As a part of an indigenous inhabited area, there are some indigenous representatives in the institutions like the Union Parishad of Chittagong Hill Tracts but

in the case of the Plainland Indigenous communities, there are no conditions or rules to elect representatives in Union Parishad. As a result, we can say that the plain land indigenous communities will be more deprived than the Hill Indigenous peoples. For instance, Nirmal Chandra Das, a representative of the Hajong community, in a webinar said, "only two to four people received one-time special assistance of TK 2500 per family from the Hon'ble Prime Minister" (The Daily Star, 30, July, 20).

We know that in the Indigenous Community-women work hard in day-to-day life. In most societies, women are food collectors and sellers. Women have to roam in the forest or stream and spring to collect food items. Similarly, women have to run to the market to sell their natural forest collects, fruits and vegetables. Due to the lack of normal movement of people and vehicles, the products produced were also sold at very low price. Due to the long-running epidemic, the hill and plain land Indigenous community have been forced to break out of their traditional customs. In Bandarban Sadar, a group of women were seen arguing over the sales of goods. The fall in the price of fruits and naturally found wild vegetables has increased their hard-work and risk as well. There are many remote villages in the hills where people especially women have to cross hills after the hills to collect water.

On the other hand, a large part of the hill youth who use to work as readymade garments workers have lost their jobs and are now spending lazy time in the villages. A short survey found that out of 55 workers in 6 villages (Khagrachari 2 and Bandarban 4) only 20 workers have returned to the work.

A recent report in a daily newspaper said, "The number of corona patients is less in the indigenous society". The report has disappointed the indigenous and concerned people. In the three hill districts, people are now receiving treatment at home according to their ability. The hill people have a 'bad habit' as they don't want to go to the hospital unless the condition is too critical. This tendency is more prevalent among the Marma. If a patient dies outside the village, it is very difficult to bring a dead body into the village. Thus most of the families don't want to get into those troubles. Recently, a tea shopkeeper at Pankhaiya Para under Khagracheri Sadar died with corona symptoms. He was not admitted to the hospital even though the hospital was nearby and his close relatives were not seen making any efforts to take him to the hospital.

Besides this, we have also read the news of measles in children in three hill districts during corona. According to the Tripura Students Forum (TSF), nine children died of measles in Rangamati and Khagrachari districts. We have also seen the news of the death of a child in Bandarban. Where measles-like vaccines are not readily available in remote areas, it is unthinkable that the financial benefits, including food aid provided by the government, would fall into the hands of Jum Cultivators.

However, the various initiatives of the students have attracted many. Students are still trying to reach as far as possible in each remote village with food items. Students have been involved in this work from the beginning. Not only the collection and distribution of food items but the university students are also conducting online education programmes in their mother tongue with the necessary advice for school and college-level exams so that they can continue their studies at home. The initiative has attracted many; these students are the ones who have also organized a Human Chain to save the natural water sources in the hills.

Student organizations have also been seen raising awareness about the epidemic by translating it into their language. I think the student organizations of the national political parties in our country can learn from the efforts of the community-based student organizations of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Not only the food crisis but also the

drinking water crisis is becoming a permanent problem in the mountains now. Water resources are now under serious threat as instead of preserving the natural streams and springs the stone of precious water sources of the hills is being lifted freely. The life of the Adivasi means to live a life of daily struggle. The epidemic has intensified their life struggles, where women are at greater risk. There is now a crisis of drinking water along with food shortage. As a result, buying soap from the market to survive the pandemic is just a luxury. Besides, health care products are not easily available in the market.

For the educated people in the city, wearing a mask is a matter of regular struggle but for the people who live among nature, who have never seen a mask in their life, for them to come to the city to sell products wearing a mask, is considered as a ridiculous thing.

There is no forest left in the hills now. On one hand, the forest department, on the other hand, the various companies have become a companion of Jum farmers who threatens their life in the hills. Ensuring Mouza forest practices and land rights will increase the ability of hill and plain forest-dependent people to cope with the food crisis. Besides this I believe that it will make a significant contribution to the growth of forests and forest resources in the Country. If the forest is protected, the hill region will not only be tourist friendly but also remain untouched as a source of endless natural beauty.

Bangladesh Bank has issued a circular on July 29 to open bank accounts to provide incentive facilities to ordinary and Jum farmers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This is undoubtedly a commendable initiative. Such constructive initiatives of the government need to reach out to the marginalized people. If some changes are made in the formulation and implementation of the government's during corona and after Corona plans, keeping in mind the inaccessibility and other aspects of the way of life of the indigenous people, they will help the forest and land-dependent people to overcome the Pandemic.

Nepal- In the Midst of COVID-19

Continued from page 6

However in the midst of this crisis there are many significant initiatives are also being started by different individuals and organizations. Due to the feeling of absence of government these tipping points are helping people who are in the crisis by initiating community kitchen, providing rations, distributing mask ad sanitizers, providing psychosocial counseling, awareness raising on COVI-19 and Gender based Violence which has also helped to save many more lives in this crisis situation. Now this is a time for us to work in a collaborative way to optimize our resources it may be in a form of financial or human resource with knowledge transfer. We need to be grounded on what we are doing to build trust and relationship among the people to maintain social harmony and building peace in our society. At this scenario women's agency, voice, and capacities are critical to local dialogues, better policies and more equitable peace deals. Here again women can bring back their experiences to maintain the social harmony and peace building as they have done this during the time armed conflict as well as in post conflict scenario. It is needed to open the civic spaces which has been shrunk now, community dialogues for alternative solution and need of flexible resources to the CBOs and NGOs whereby they can initiate different social cohesion initiatives to hold their communities in their respective areas and to contribute for community peace building.

Pandemic and Poetry: How Writers in Pakistan React to COVID-19

By **DR AFTAB HUSAIN,** PAKISTAN

THERE is a proverb in Persian and Urdu that could be roughly translated thus — 'A collective death has an air of festivity'. The great Urdu poet, Ghalib, however, would have not subscribed to this notion as was made evident from an episode in his personal life. Once afflicted by his financial and existential miseries, he had foretold his own death the following year. There broke out in the given year an epidemic that claimed many lives in the city, but luckily our poet survived. When asked later about his prognostication, Ghalib replied with a tinge of humour that his forecast had been accurate, but it would have degraded him to die a common death, therefore, he held himself back.

This could be seen as a hyper-individualistic thought process of a genius poet which was ultimately reflected in his poetry. But common human beings think differently. The line of wisdom that the proverb at the starting of this essay conveys does not in any way celebrate death, but our collective, gregarious nature. It is a strange fact of human existence that a catastrophe unites people more than a festivity.

World literature, as many of us know, is replete with the examples of writing inspired by or dealing with different catastrophes; draught, floods, different types of epidemic: plague, cholera, influenza etc. *The Plague* by Albert Camus (French), *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez (Spanish) and *Blindness* by José Saramago (Portuguese) – incidentally all three written by Nobel laureates – immediately come to mind.

Rabindranath Tagore's long, descriptive poem: '*Puratan Bhritya*' (Old servant) – 'Keshta, old manservant of mine', stemmed from smallpox. In a few short stories by Premchand, the founding father of Urdu and Hindi fiction there appears pestilence – albeit as subtext. In '*Idgah*' (mosque), the child protagonist lost his father to cholera. Similarly, in '*Doodh Ka Daam*' (price of milk), one character dies of plague. Famous Urdu and English fiction writer Ahmad Ali who is known to the Urdu world as one of the contributors to *Angaaree* (The Burning Coals) an anthology of mainly short stories that had stirred the somewhat stagnant waters of the then Urdu literature, ventured into this area with his maiden novel in English. Ahmad Ali's novel, *Twilight in Delhi*, offers a bleak and pathetic picture of the city in the wake of an epidemic. '*How deadly this fever is. Everyone is dying of it. The hospitals are gay and bright. But sorry is men's plight*'.

'Rebati', a well-known short story by Fakir Mohan Senapati, one of the pioneers of modern Odia literature depicts a village hit by a cholera epidemic. The list is endless, but so far Urdu literature is concerned, 'Quarantine', a poignant short story by Rajinder Singh Bedi presents a detailed and exclusive description of the life affected by plague and also of quarantine as the title of the story also indicates.

Human beings in the long span of their history have been going through many different epidemics, but the present one is unique in that it has not only affected different strata of society, it has also had a global outreach. With bated breath, we watch the movement of this pandemic that has paralysed social life. Nevertheless, health-care workers, scientists, politicians, policy makers, psychiatrists, media persons and many other groups are actively working to finding a solution to the problem or at least curb its growth.

People from art and literature too are

responding to the disease in different ways. Pakistani writers, especially poets, have profusely responded to the situation.

One interesting fact that one notices is in the word 'corona', that is, we know, a noun but when spelt out in Urdu-Hindi it makes a full-fledged meaningful phrase: 'Don't do.' Resultantly, one observes a lot of versifications exploiting this pun – albeit major and established poets have shunned this facile jugglery. Barring this word play, poets who have chosen to write in a lighter vein seemingly have set their comic spirit to work as a defence mechanism to make the grave situation a little less intimidating. For example, a poem entitled as 'Thanks' by a senior poet Tahir Sherazi argues that this compulsory restriction that confines us to our home places might provide us an opportunity to repair our broken relationships with our family members. The poems ends on a jubilant note on acquiring the newly-gained leisure in this way: '*My wife will make a cup of tea for me and I will write poems on roses, lamps, on the earth and the heaven'*. Well, the male poet is scheming of enjoying this free time at his will while his spouse will be doomed to carry on with her routine domestic chores. This aspect does make this otherwise light poem somewhat pathetic.

Poets with a religious sensibility see this development as sort divine wrath and put forward their sentiments either in direct prayers or by employing religious terminology. 'A Dialogue with God in the Days of Epidemic' by Najma Mansoor, and 'In the Days of Epidemic' by Safia Hayat, are both of this vein. But, in major and significant poets you find no direct recourse to divine powers or holy personages, but only a thin, veiled religious consciousness.

'God Smiles in Their Eyes', a poem by Ali Muhammad Farshi, a senior poet, pays tribute to the life-saving endeavours of a nurse who had wrenched back a bride from the clutches of death. Quite pertinently, the poet invokes figures of Mary and Christ, the messiah, and despite having no apparent reference to corona the poem provides a penetrating presentation of the present state of affairs. 'God, Epidemic and Human Beings' by Jameelur Rahman is also a poem sprinkled with religious diction, but its overall philosophical tone saves the poem from becoming mere-lamentation of a pious soul caught in an unbearable suffering.

However, Maqsood Wafa altogether rejects the role of religion in such a dreadful disease as he puts it in the closing lines of his poem, 'The Captive Days': *"I will listen to the Prime Minister's speech/And I won't be able to make the people of this holy land understand/ that when a virus attacks a human being/It doesn't ask the name of his god"*. Almost similar is the tone in Saqib Nadeem's poem: "We Don't Accept (The Poem of A Petty Sentimentality)" where the poet lashes at the shallow and hypocritical religious community. *"After every prayer we embrace and congratulate each other on being alive and we trade in kisses, (but) we don't hear screams of virus in our kisses"*.

Then, there is a group that believes that one can with the power of love conquer this monster. 'An Innocent Poem' by Parveen Tahir speaks about the wishes of its female protagonist – a lover – who kisses her lover and dines with him in the naive expectation that the disease will at least spare those who are in love. Seemab Zafar's 'One Erects Love with the Bricks of Affliction' does not offer such optimism but presents a desolate scenario – within and without. 'On Death Bed' by Fatima Mehru juxtaposes among the triad of love, disease and death. It is soulful poem that vacillates between life affirming spirit of love and that of despair. Some poems in this category remind you Márquez's *Love in the Times of Cholera* – at least title of the novel which is quite a popular book. Khumar Meerzada's two short and impressive poems 'Love in the Days of Epidemic' and 'Love and Epidemic' show how love act in front of such a fatal malady. Iftekhar Bukhari's 'We Descends from One Father' does not lose touch to the ground reality, yet it rises up to the lofty human bonds. *"We will not shake hands/ This is time that we united our heart….Without urgent needs we will not leave our house/In order that roads, fields and gardens are again full of life…./If needed, we will go and die in a silent corner/So that the earth might echo with songs, even after our departure."* A powerful poem, indeed!

Arshad Latif took a different, cynial and somewhat callous stance towards the given grave situation. *"We couldn't control our*

inhuman impulses/And our negative thoughts took us far away from the life itself…We, you and some others proved a total failure…./Embrace death willingly so that souls of us, yours and some others could bequeath peace". ('The World Wants A Cure').

Whereas Salmat Sarwat's 'Quarantine No 1' portrays the ennui spawned by an ever-spreading leisure and the resultant disinclination to write further, Gulnaz Kausar's 'Precaution' is composed in the poet's typically soft and feminine style. Her diction and her treatment leave, despite the morbid subject of the poem, a soothing effect on the reader.

At least two other poems: 'Quarantine' by Irfan Sadiq and 'Seventh Day in the Quarantine' by Omer Aziz, take not only the term of quarantine in their titles, but they revolve around this trope. Aziz, a doctor by profession, has quite effectively captured the physical affliction and mental agony of a patient put in quarantine.

Alongside such poems, there is a wide circulation of individual ghazal couplets: the two liners that quite succinctly sum up the general mood about the epidemic. Most of these small pieces, for their overflowing sentimentality or sheer propaganda do not have much appeal. Yet, a few of them not only hit the bull's eye, but they do not veer away from the aesthetic requirement of a piece of literature.

Afsaos, Ye Wabaa Ke DinoN Ki MohabbateN

Ik Doosre Se Haath Milaane Se Bhi Gaye

(Sajjad Baloch)

Alas, these love affairs in the days of epidemic!

Even shaking hands with each other is rendered hard

*

Har Taraf Aisii Khamoshii Hay Ki Sar Ghoomta Hay

Log Pahre MeN HaiN Aur GalioN Men Dar Ghoomta Hay

(Seemab Zafar)

A terrible hush rules all over and makes you feel giddy

Human being caught in the custody

While a certain fearfulness prowls in the streets

*

Ajeeb Dard Hay Jis Kii Dawaa Hay Tanhaaii

Baqaa e Shahr Hay Ab Shahr Ke Ujadne MeN

(Mahmood Shaam)

What a weird malady is it whose cure lies in solitude!

Now the survival of the city is in its depopulation.

Thus, we see that an overwhelming response to the pandemic came from our poets. As for prose, though in general there are a plethora of pieces written on the subject, that is, journalistic writing, but quite rarely one comes across relevant fiction, fictional narrative or imaginative prose. Justifying this comparative absence fiction writer M Hameed Shahid says: *"Poetry might be composed in reaction to a happening, for fiction that is not enough. Fiction needs something more to build up its aesthetics*," he adds. Well, our writers writing on the communal riots in the wake of the Partition of India in 1947 did produce literature in reaction to these events, though such literature was, to be sure, not created while the riots were still taking place. M. Hameed Shahid is therefore in favour of waiting and seeing and letting his experience take a mature form, so he stayed away from offering something half-backed in fiction. Nevertheless, he has come forward with a non-fictional narrative: 'Epidemic Days, Closed Door & Deserted Street' – a sort of chronicle-narrative and despite its excessive self referentiality, the write up is interesting in the sense that it, at least, introduces us to the disquiet and anxieties of a writer finding himself in the midst of a prison-like claustrophobic confinement.

Meanwhile, another fiction writer who has given a clarion call to his colleagues and urged them use their pens in dispelling the gloomy atmosphere created by the disease is Amjad Tuhfail. He was, however, snubbed by A senior short story writer declaring that any such move was to yield nothing but slogan-mongering that jump on the bandwagon could bring out only 'faction' and in no way any genuine fiction. A Lahore based short story writer, Tufail, did not take this warning seriously and imediately posted a three-page short story in a social-media outlet. Jabir Ali

Continued to page 18

Virulent Language: Reinforcing Casteism

By **SAMIR NAZARETH,** INDIA

THE human vocabulary is constantly expanding with new words and with old words being used in new ways. In the Covid-19 era, phrases like 'social distancing', 'handwashing', 'be kind', 'be humble' and so on have become bywords for practices to contain the virus. However, a study of prejudice and bigotry shows that these terms can represent discrimination too.

The call to 'wash hands' assumes everyone has equal access to water. In India, an estimated 163 million people do not have access to clean water. One of the major causes of this is a myriad forms of 'social distancing' put in place by racism and casteism. Historically, one reason for communities being kept at the fringes was to limit their access to common resources; it ensured their subservience. This attitude continues in various permutations today.

In modern India, the caste system remains deeply entrenched. Although a crime, caste prejudice plays out daily in a variety of ways. In rural India, ancient tradition and modern-day enforcement prevent lower castes from accessing water from community sources. In urban areas, socialization of bigotry translates into official apathy. A statistical compendium, published by the ministry of housing and urban poverty alleviation, found that in urban areas the population of scheduled castes in slums was higher than of those not living in slums. It correlates to the fact that inhabitants of slums have limited access to water, sanitation and sewerage. Similar issues are faced by the Black people in the United States of America. A report from the Thurgood Marshall Institute at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund titled, Water/Colour: A Study of Race and the Water Affordability Crisis in America's Cities, found "a clear connection between racial residential segregation and Black access to water systems." A consequence of rising water supply prices for communities of colour is the loss of their homes.

Religious infusions give discrimination credibility and proselytize its praxis. The belief in the divine origins of the caste system and the concepts of rebirth and karma justified prejudices and ensured victims accepted their situation without a murmur. Slave traders and owners selectively quoted the Bible to validate their inhuman practices. Later, the prejudices from these narrow interpretations were fortified with illegitimate science and the economics of exploitation. It transubstantiated into laws that aided the transmission of racism through the community. Over time these were reinforced, socialized and institutionalized, so much so that their vestiges continue to exist even after the abolishment and the criminalization of their practice.

Paradoxically, acts of kindness and humility — integral to socio-religious obligation — never hindered bigotry. Thus, such edicts as 'be kind' and 'be humble' could not cross the boundaries of race and caste. Generosity, kindness and other forms of altruism were limited to the tangible and directed towards saving the self. Temples in India were, and still are, recipients of large donations. The social walls of the caste system prevented the lower castes from receiving the charity of the upper castes. Humility, viewed as a character trait, enhanced one's standing amongst peers. Hence, it was restricted to those of higher or

similar castes. However, humility translating into respectful treatment of lower castes could lead to lowering of one's social standing.

The Christian belief that 'god made man in his own image' did not extend to slaves and people of colour. Displays of respect, chivalry, kindness were contained within White society. Attempts to protect this way of life led to Christian fanaticism and white nationalism. Their followers were further emboldened by segregationist laws. By the time these laws were abolished, racism had been institutionalized. Society had not only been inoculated to the horrors of racism but had been afflicted by unconscious biases. Today, Donald Trump has re-invigorated racists.

In India, the 'community transmission' of discrimination was incremental, growing from inside out. In Indian Cultures as Heritage, the historian, Romila Thapar, suggests that the division of society into castes was an outcome of early families setting up an organizational structure. She also indicates that skin colour and difference of language led to some communities being kept at bay. Such segregations would have perforce influenced interactions. Later, the attribution of these units' creation to the divine and birth becoming the arbiter of inclusion in a unit made this compartmentalization inviolate. Development of religious rituals, the introduction of social behaviour and customs, and the use of violence ensured normalization and adherence. The 'herd immunity' achieved through centuries of practise of, and indoctrination to, casteism makes it par for the course today.

Covid-19 reiterates the fact that deeply embedded prejudices impede the delivery of healthcare to minorities. If the virus provided an opportunity for a dialogue about the many cascading consequences of racism and bigotry it was lost to discussing the calamitous decisions of national leaders bumbling through varied virus containment strategies. The terms that define actions to protect us from the virus should serve as a reminder of the need to prevent bigotry.

Courtesy: telegraphindia.com

Pandemic and Poetry

Continued from page 16

Syed had once called Shamsur Rahman Faruqi known as the "the impetuous critic". The gentleman story writer might be no match for Faruqi, but he shares, at least, this quality with his senior contemporary.

As a saving grace to this discouraging deficiency in prose, comes an English write-up, "Something's not right with the world", from Farah Zia. The small item that the writer prefers to call "a mood piece" appears like a free stroke by some accomplished painter: laconic, telling and powerful. *"It is like waking up every day into a dream: in a place where life imitates fiction"* thus begins the write up. Written with profound concern, yet at the same time, with a cold objectivity, it makes a serene and soulful reading. No wonder, the piece was quickly rendered into Urdu and published, but one wonders if such a deeply-felt prose could be translated without losing much of its essential charm and pathos.

Closing the deliberations one can say that each piece that is being written in the name of literature cannot be, quite naturally, up to the literary mark – let alone to be remembered by posterity. Most of these writings fall into the category of *pièce d'occasion*. But such pieces, occasioned by certain events sometimes transcend the given situation and live on, beyond the time of their creation. Some of the given stuff has remarkable literary value and therefore it might survive longer; the other ones might not be fortune enough, but the fact remains that they too bear a witness to a momentous phenomenon in human history and have transcribed these times on the climate of our minds.

Courtesy: countercurrents.org

Bangladesh Deals with Triple Disasters of Flooding, Coronavirus and Lost Livelihood

By **FARID AHMED**, BANGLADESH

WITH nearly 5.5 million people people across Bangladesh affected by severe flooding — the worst in two decades — humanitarian experts are concerned that millions of people, already badly impacted by COVID-19, will be pushed further into poverty.

With a third of the country under water, the National Disaster Response Coordination Centre in Bangladesh has reported that some 5.5 million people or nearly a million families were affected by the flooding as of Tuesday, Aug. 4.

The Health Emergency Control Room has recorded at least 145 deaths, mostly from drowning or snakebites, in 33 of the 64 districts affected by flooding.

In the past three days alone, two more districts were freshly inundated by heavy rains, affecting nearly half a million more people.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) said in a Aug. 4 report that heavy monsoon rains in upstream regions continued to cause flooding in Bangladesh's districts in the north, north-east and south-east, affecting some 5.4 million people.

June to August is typically the monsoon season here, but since the start of June heavy rains have resulted in many of the country's rivers reaching levels classified as "dangerous".

UN OCHA said the flooding had damaged houses, dykes, embankments, safe water sources and hygiene facilities and also adversely affected livelihoods, especially in the agricultural sector. It had also disrupted access to basic services such as health care and education.

"I have lost everything in the river Jamuna – my home, my croplands… it went under water so swiftly that I couldn't save my belongings either," Abdur Rahman from Sirajganj region, north-central Bangladesh said.

A number of low-lying areas in Sirajganj were affected by flooding when the Jamuna river levels rose in July, leaving hundreds homeless. The Jamuna and Padma rivers are two of the country's main rivers. The Padma, the main distributary of the Ganges, also burst it banks last month. In several districts, school buildings, roads and other structures were destroyed.

It is not just Bangladesh that is affected. Flooding has wreaked havoc across a large part of South Asia. In Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan several million people have been affected and scores killed. Assam, Bihar and part of West Bengal were the worst-affected states in India.

"People in Bangladesh, India and Nepal are sandwiched in a triple disaster of flooding, coronavirus and an associated socioeconomic crisis of loss of livelihoods and jobs," Jagan Chapagain, the secretary general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), said.

"Millions of people across Bangladesh, India and Nepal have been marooned, their homes damaged and crops destroyed by floods that are the worst in recent years," Chaplain added.

He said the flooding of farm lands and destruction of crops could push millions of people, already badly impacted by COVID-19, further into poverty.

In Bangladesh, the worst affected are those who have become paupers overnight as they lost their homes, belongings and croplands.

In some districts, entire villages are under water, forcing people to leave their homes in search of safety while many were seen crouching on rooftops waiting for rescue. In the flooded northern districts in Bangladesh, it was a common sight of villagers marooned on the roofs of their houses along with their livestock or poultry while many others sought shelter on embankments or roads.

Arif Hossain from Munshiganj District, central Bangladesh, was a tailor by profession before the coronavirus pandemic. Now he spends his days ferrying people in the submerged locality on his small boat.

In central Bangladesh, major rivers continue to overflow, causing heavy flooding to ravage low-lying parts of the capital, Dhaka. In adjoining districts and northern parts of the country much of the population, who have already been affected by the coronavirus lockdowns, are in dire straits. Poorly-prepared relief operations have aggravated the plight of victims, triggering public anger and widespread criticism of the government.

"I haven't received any kind of aid," Hossain told IPS.

"Many people in the areas left the villages… those who have no place to go, like me, are staying here in homes that are already [flooded]," Hossain told IPS adding, "We're staying in a room submerged in knee-deep water… my two children are always scared of snakes."

The flooding is the second natural disaster that the country has had to deal with in as many months. In May, Cyclone Amphan made landfall in the midst of the country's coronavirus lockdown. More than 2.4 million people and over half a million livestock had to be evactued from the in the coastal districts of Khulna, Satkheera, Jessore, Rajbadi and Sirajganj.

Manju Begum, 85, who lives alone in Medeni Mandal in Munshiganj District, central Bangladesh, 55 kilometres from capital, decried the non-action of local public representatives. She told IPS that nobody from her local government had offered her assistance after her home had been flooded.

"Floodwater entered my bedroom eight days ago… I got a little amount of food only from my neighbours," she said.

However, last week Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked all government officials to remain prepared to extend support to those affected by the floods. She assured the country that extensive assistance would be given to the flood victims.

Bangladesh state minister for disaster management and relief Md. Enamur Rahman said they had formed six committees to monitor the activities of government relief assistance programmes.

The government has distributed cash, rice and other materials to those affected by the flooding and allocations would be increased if needed, Rahman said at a press conference in Dhaka last week.

Mostak Hussain, humanitarian director for Save the Children in Bangladesh, said nearly two million children here were affected by the longest-lasting floods in over 20 years.

"This has been a devastating monsoon so far and we're only half way through the season," he said.

The flooding has also left a large number of women affected as their livelihoods such as livestock, poultry farming, vegetable cultivation or tailoring have come to a halt. Initially, they faced setbacks to income generation as the coronavirus pandemic resulted in the country being shutdown.

"I took a loan from an NGO and started a poultry farm a couple of years ago, but I was forced to sell the chickens at a cheaper price as water inundated my house… now I'm not sure how would I repay the loan or maintain the family expenditure as I don't have any work," Shahana Begum, a widow, told IPS.

Courtesy: ipsnews.net

CHAPTER : X

POETRY'S DREAM WORK

By **CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL**

....Continued from previous issue

THIS leads to surréaliste technique with its undirected feeling and personal affective organisation, where freedom, in true bourgeois style, is the unconsciousness of necessity, i.e. ignorance of the affective organisation which determines the flow of imagery and is conscious in good poetry. Hence the cerebral and visual character of surréaliste art. This bourgeois freedom was already contained in the philosophy of symbolism, from which surréalisme derives. Remy de Gourmont, the philosopher of symbolism, correctly said: "Above all it is a theory of liberty; it implies absolute freedom of thought and form: it is the free and individual development of the aesthetic personality." And Rimbaud, greatest of the symbolist poets, said: "I have come to hold sacred the disorder of my mind."

Poetry, like dream, contains manifest and latent contents. The manifest content can be roughly arrived at by paraphrasing the poem. It is the imagery or the "ideas." In a paraphrase the latent content, i.e. the emotional content, has almost entirely vanished. It was contained, then, not in the external reality symbolised by the words (for this has been preserved) but in the words themselves. The manifest content is the poetry interpreted "rationally." It is the external reality in the poem. It can be expressed in other ways and other languages. But the latent content of poetry is in that particular form of wording, and in no other.

How is the latent content contained in the original word and not contained in the sense of the words – i.e. in the portions of external reality which the words symbolise? The emotions are not associated affectively with the portion of external reality symbolised by the manifest content, for another language can be made to symbolise the same portion of external reality, and still it is not the poem. How then did the original words contain the emotional content "in themselves" and not in the things they symbolised? Dream analysis gives us the answer, by affective association of ideas. In any association of ideas two images are tied to each other by something different, like sticks by a cord. In poetry they are tied by affects.

If a word is abstracted from its surroundings and concentrated on in the same way as an analyst asked his patient to concentrate on any particular image of a dream, a number of associations will rise vaguely to the mind. In a simple word like "spring" there are hundreds of them; of greenness, of youth, of fountains, of jumping; every word drags behind it a vast bag and baggage of emotional associations, picked up in the thousands of different circumstances in which the word was used. It is these associations that provided the latent content of affect which is the poem. Not the ideas of "greenness," "youth," but the affective cord linking the ideas of "greenness" and "youth" to the word "spring," constitutes the raw material of poetry.

Of course the thing "spring" (the season) denoted by the word "spring" also has many affective associations. These are tried by the novel. Poetry is concerned with the more general, subtle and instinctive affects

which are immediately associated with the word "spring" and therefore include such almost running associations as those connected with spring (a fountain) and spring (to jump). Hence the tendency of poetry to play with words, to pun openly or secretly, to delight in the texture of words. This is part of the technique of poetry which treats words anti-grammatically to realise their immediate and even contradictory affective tones. The novel uses words grammatically so as sharply to exclude all meanings and therefore all affective tones, except one clear piece of reality, and then derives the emotional content from this piece of reality and its active relation with the other pieces of reality in the story as part of a perceptual life-experience.

When we read a line of poetry these other ideas to which the affects are associated do not rise to the mind. We get the leaping and gushiness of "spring" in poetry's use of it as a word for the idea "season," but we do not get the fountain or the jump except in an open poetic pun. They remain unconscious. Poetry is a kind of inverted dream. Whereas in dream the real affects are partly suppressed and the blended images rise into the conscious, in poetry the associated images are partly suppressed and it is the blended affects that are present in the consciousness, in the form of affective organisation.

Why is there a manifest content at all? Why are not all images suppressed? Why is not great poetry like the poetry of the extreme symbolists, a mere collection of words, meaning nothing, but words themselves full of affective association? Why should poetry state, explain, narrate, obey grammar, have syntax, be capable of paraphrase, since if paraphrased it loses its affective value?

The answer is, because poetry is an adaptation to external reality. It is an emotional attitude towards the world. It is made of language and language was created to signify otherness, to indicate portions of objective reality shared socially. It lives in the same language as scientific thought. The manifest content represents a statement of external reality. The manifest content is symbolic of a certain piece of external reality— be it scene, problem, thought, event. And the emotional content is attached to this statement of reality, not in actual experience but in the poem. The emotional content sweats out of the piece of external reality. In life this piece of external reality is devoid of emotional tone, but described in those particular words, and no others, it suddenly and magically shimmers with affective colouring. That affective colouring represents emotional organisation similar to that which the poet himself felt when faced (in phantasy or actuality) with that piece of external reality. When the poet says,

Sleep, that knots up the ravelled sleave of care,

he is making a manifest statement. The paraphrase

Slumber, that unties worry, which is like a piece of tangled knitting,

carries over most of the manifest content, but the affective tones which lurked in the associations of the words used have vanished. It is like a conjuring trick. The poet holds up a piece of the world and we see it glowing with a strange emotional fire. If we analyse it "rationally," we find no fire. Yet none the less, for ever afterwards, that piece of reality still keeps an afterglow about it, is still fragrant with emotional life. So poetry enriches external reality for us.

The affective associations used by poetry are of many forms. Sometimes they are sound associations, and then we call the line "musical" – not that the language is specially harmonious; to a foreigner it would probably have no particular verbal melody

Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks

In Vallambrosa

is not musical to someone who knows no English. But to an English ear the emotive associations wakened are aroused through the sound rather than sense linkages, and hence we call the line musical. So, too, with Verlaine's line, musical only to ears attuned to the emotive associations of French nasals:

Et O – ces voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole,

or the old fairy-tale, "La Belle aux bois dormant."

It is impossible to have affects in poetry without their adherence to symbols of external reality, for poetry's affects (in far as they are poetic) are social, and it is impossible for different subjects to be linked except by a common object (by "matter"). The logical conclusion of symbolism is not poetry but music. And here it may be objected – music consists of sounds which refer to no external reality and yet music is an art and has a social content. Exactly – because in music the symbols have ceased to "refer" to external reality and have become portions of external reality themselves and, in doing so, have necessarily generated a formal structure (the scale, "rules" of harmony, etc;) which gives them the rigidity and social status of external reality. The notes of music themselves are the manifest content of music, and they therefore obey not grammatical (subjective) but pseudo-mathematical (objective) laws: of course they are necessarily distorted or organised within the compass of those rules. In the same way architecture becomes external reality and is distorted or organised within the compass of the rules of use-function.

The technique of the poet consists in this, that not all the affects associated with any particular words rise up into the consciousness, but only those that are required. This is done by the arrangement of the words in such a way that their clusters of associations, impinging on each other heighten some affective associations and inhibit the others, and so form an organised mass of emotion. The affective colouring of one word takes reflected shadow and light from the colours of the other words. It does this partly through their contiguity, particularly in synthetic languages (Latin and Greek), and partly through their grammatical connection, particularly in analytic languages (English, Chinese); but chiefly through the "meaning" as a whole. The manifest content, the literal meaning, the paraphrasable sense, is a kind of bridge, or electrical conductor, which puts all the affective currents of each word into contact. It is like a switchboard; some of the affective associations fade away directly they enter it, others run down into other words and alter their colour; others blend together and heighten a particular word. The whole forms the specific fused glow which is that poem's affective organisation or emotional attitude to its meaning. Hence the same word has a different affective coloration in one poem from what it has in another, and it is for this reason that a poem is concrete. It is affectively concrete; each word has a special affective significance in that poem different from what it has in another. In this way the emotional content does not float about fluidly in the mind; it is firmly attached, by a hundred interweaving strands, to the manifest content – a piece of external reality. A poem's content is not just emotion, it is organised emotion, an organised emotional attitude to a piece of external reality. Hence its value – and difficulty – as compared with other emotions, however strong, but unorganised – a sudden inexplicable fit of sorrow, a gust of blind rage, a blank despair. Such emotions are unaesthetic because unorganised. They are unorganised socially because they are not organised in relation to a socially accepted external reality. They are unconscious of outer necessity. The emotions of poetry are part of the manifest content. They seem to be in the external reality as it appears in the poem. We do not appear to take up an emotional attitude to a piece of reality; it is there, given in the reality: that is the way of emotional cognition, In poetic cognition, objects are presented already stamped with feeling-judgments. |Hence the adaptive value of poetry. It is like a real emotional experience.

It is plain that poetry may be judged in different ways; either by the importance of the manifest content, or by the vividness of the affective colouring. To a poet who brings a new portion of external reality into the ambit of poetry, we feel more gratitude than to one who brings the old stale manifest

contents. But the first poet may be poor in the affective colour with which he soaks his piece of reality. It may be the old stale colouring, whereas our other poet, in spite of his conventional piece of reality, may achieve a new affective tone. Old poets, we shall judge almost entirely by their affective tone; their manifest contents have long belonged to our world of thought. Hence the apparent triteness of old poetry which yet is a great triteness. From new poets we demand new manifest contents and new affective colouring, for it is their function to give us new emotional attitudes to a new social environment. A poet who provides both to a high degree will be a good poet. A poet who brings into his net a vast amount of new reality to which he attaches a wide-ranging affective colouring we shall call a great poet, giving Shakespeare as an instance. Hence great poems are always long poems, just because of the quantity of reality they muss include as manifest content. But the manifest content, whatever it is, is not the purpose of the poem. The purpose is the specific emotional organisation directed towards the manifest content and provided by the released affects. The affects are not "latent," as in dream; it is associated ideas which are suppressed to form the latent content. Just as the key to dream is a series of instinctive attitudes which provide the mechanism of dream-work, so the key to poetry is a cluster of suppressed pieces of external reality – a vague unconscious world of life-experience.

Poetry colours the world of reality with affective tones. These affective colours are not "pretty-pretty," for it is still the real world of necessity, and great poetry will not disguise the nakedness of outer necessity, only cause it to shine with the glow of interest. Poetry soaks external reality – nature and society – with emotional significance. This significance, because it gives the organism an appetitive interest in external reality, enables the organism to deal with it more resolutely, whether in the world of reality or of phantasy. The primitive who would lose interest in the exhausting labour necessary to plough an arid abstract collection of soil, will find heart when the earth is charged with the affective colouring of "Mother Nature" for now, by the magic of poetry, it glows with the appetitive tints of sexuality or filial love. These affective colours are not unreal because they are not scientific, for they are the colouring of the genotype's own instincts, and these instincts are as real as the earth is real. The significant expression projected by poetry on to the face of external reality is simply this, a prophecy of the endless attempt of the genotype to mould necessity to its own likeness, which it obtains a continually increasing success. "Matter, surrounded by a sensuous poetic glamour, seems to attract man's whole entity by winning smiles." So said Marx and Engels of materialism before it became one-sided mechanical materialism, when it was still bathed in the artistic splendour of the Renaissance. That sensuous glamour is given by poetry; and materialism became one-sided when, afraid of feeling the self, it became aridly scientific and matter vanishes in a logical but empty wave-system. Poetry restores life and value to matter, and puts back the genotype into the world from which it was banished.

to be continued...

Courtesy : Illusion and Reality

INSTITUTE for SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, New Delhi, India
TELEPHONE : 091-011-26177904, TELEFAX : 091-011-26177904
E-MAIL : prakashan.isd@gmail.com, notowar.isd@gmail.com / WEBSITE : www.isd.net.in