

Some Random Notings

Putting in black and white, the myriad and varied experiences and thoughts which flooded my mind during these abnormal times, is a task which is tough. The surfeit of data and the deluge of viewpoints across media, on the COVID-19 issue initially triggered the mind into forming opinions which ranged from the benign to the belligerent. However, gradually with the passage of time, the mind has started to go numb and detach itself from the cacophony emanating from all and sundry sources. Amphan cyclone, pestilence, tension along the northern frontiers have only weighed down the mind more and led to more diffidence. Thus, the task of writing this piece envisaged bringing the rudderless mind on chartered waters again.

The most disturbing imagery of the period has been the plight of the plebeians, be it their long and arduous trek back home or the misfortune of losing their livelihoods. The intolerable and heart wrenching tales of sufferings from across the country has left an indelible print on human psyche, and I am no exception. Cocooned in the cozy confines of a secured home and protected by the safety net of a secured salary during prolonged forced absence from workplace, the vagaries of uncertain times may not have affected me personally much, but it has surely engendered a sense of guilt. Can somebody be safe and happy on an island for long when surrounded by a fuming and frothing sea? Despite helping some people at an individual level, the sense of guilt has not disappeared. May be, all is not dead and buried within me.

The social science student in me again perceived some unpalatable facts. The absolute panache with which some people have been flouting well meaning directives of governments has been agonizing. They seem to be suffering from a sense of fatalism emanating from either helplessness or are manifesting their perpetual disobedience to rules and customs. Also the politicking around the distress of people has added more to my distaste, though it was destined to happen as politics revolves around scarcity in a country like ours. Another thought which stares back hard is the diminishing capacity of the nation to look after its burgeoning mass of citizens. Lack of beds, doctors, para-medics, questionable disposal of bodies, dearth of transport etc. are grim pointers to this alarming and ominous trend. Whether this cataclysmic period will lead to a paradigm shift, is a matter of conjecture.

But all has not been gloom and doom. The lockdown has brought out certain facets of life which are of great importance both at individual and societal levels. The clear night skies and sound of crickets, the eerie yet enjoyable afternoon silence of the surroundings punctuated with the chirping of birds, the visuals of remote mountains being visible again have only increased the longing for a better place to live. But the rude fact is that this has come at a monumental human and economic cost. Thus, the romanticism was jolted by the bare facts of life. This seems to be a zero sum game. Mankind cannot reconcile the march of civilization and the preservation of nature. Enjoyment of nature cannot be at the cost of mankind. Thus, the 'rebooting' of nature will be a temporary phenomenon only. The present times only reiterated the fact that this conundrum is here to stay.

This hiatus also demonstrated that we can live without our daily dose of inane TV serials. But there remains a caveat, personally for me. Never did I imagine that I would be watching my favourite TV programmes of my childhood days again. Being a person who enjoys the pangs of sweet memories and relishes being steeped in nostalgia, this was an opportunity to behold. Also, many books on my bookshelves seemed 'surprised and filled with glee' when I turned their yellow pages, maybe after eons. Spending long period of time with family has been a blessing which was totally unaccounted for in the hurly burly of daily existence prior to lockdown. Educating children about difficult times like wars and partitions adds to their coping capabilities during these difficult times apart from making them more sensitive to society.

The internment over Covid-19 has led to the exponential growth of online communication. The fetish for online instruction in educational institutions has also been a revealing feature. Driven by multinational behemoths and giant technological entities, the online delivery of education has made the digital divide in the society starker. While the urban and semi-urban students, teachers and scholars have made use of the IT infrastructure to the fullest possible extent, the populace of the hinterland has suffered due to lack of robust IT infrastructure. Also, as a teacher, never did I understand more the value of classroom teaching more than the present times. Thus, ironically, this period demonstrated the value of online teaching but also the efficacy of classroom teaching.

To conclude, amidst the barren and grey landscape of lockdown, there has been sprouting of green for sure. One has to toil on and hope for the best. The scars will be there for long but we need to move on.

Dr.Siddhartha Dasgupta,

Department of Political Science