
THE TRAGEDY OF VACCINE NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

On 30th January 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the pandemic it brought the world under shackles. The world which has stepped into a whole new phase of development and growth was made to go numb. It just took a pandemic to cripple the economy of the entire world. Years of medical infrastructure of various countries seemed to lay dead in front of the pandemic. Effecting a large number of the world's population it shattered the pillars of capitalism. Nationalism took a different role because as known nationalism is a global and ubiquitous idea in the contemporary world and now it wants to explore that whether exclusionary tendencies have been reinforced by the pandemic. Along with it came up the approach or concept of Vaccine Nationalism which somewhat exposed the domination and self – centeredness of the well doing development countries which further was suppressed by more effective initiatives taken by middle – low developing countries and tried to equalize everyone's needs. All these essential of pandemic gave rise to the post pandemic consequences which had a deep effect on the entire human race along with the economic and social life of the people.

Introduction

Nationalism is a global and ubiquitous idea in the contemporary world. It has its roots deep embedded in the whole world. It all began when people started choose a specific symbol as the identity of themselves and their nation which tend to become a collective identity for everyone present in that nation. Thus this gave to the rise of the approach where people prioritize their own country first that is its people and its market. The interplay of pandemics and nationalism has received a mere attention in this contemporary world as hardly there has been handful of pandemics. So when the world growth and development was stabbed by the pandemic it was noted that the dominant rise in the global nationalism was somewhere the effect of the pandemic. As the whole system was shut down globally with the economy shattering down into pieces, loss of enormous lives and together with closings of the national / international borders affected people in a drastic way leading to the self – centered approach of people as well as the governments made the response of nationalism more salient as people choose to prioritize their own community first. As a result the theory of Vaccine Nationalism came into play.

Global Nationalism in Times of COVID -19.

“Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of the mankind” this was stated by Albert Einstein (1929). Nationalism – the central ideology has spread its root deep down in the spirits of the entire world for now about two or more centuries. Nationalism has always been considered as narrow ideology which has ever since restricted itself to the orthodox belief of by the nation for the nation. In other words nationalism sees the world as different nations and not as one. In this case an argument can be established that as it is a worldwide problem it should be considered as a global issue where the enemy should be the virus and not any another nation as the pandemic calls for cooperation. Nationalism being a ubiquitous idea cannot be confined within a single definition as it is approached and preached in multi faced ways in various countries. A plenty of factors such as worldwide government policies, global capitalism, foreign affairs, state policies, political affairs and biasness have being structuring nationalism throughout the centuries. But the scar of the pandemic have shaken the whole structure of nationalism. Now the only thing that has to be seen is that how does the post – pandemic world structure nationalism.

¹Ever since the contemporary world came into existence, hardly it has experienced such a deadliest pandemic. Even both the world wars had killed a less amount of people than the COVID – 19. As a result of which the governments faced a major setback at the first place in handling the situation. Starting from the Spanish Flu (1918 -1920) to Influenza Outbreak continuing to various earthquakes, droughts and other natural disasters always created a critical juncture for the world. The critical juncture though made it difficult for the governments to tackle the situation yet after every critical juncture the world nationalism, capitalism and all other essential factors opened their doors to new possibilities which further prepared the world for new challenges. But with pandemic came its effects or consequences. Some first hand effects are:

- The recent trajectory of nationalism and the social relevance of nationalism prior to the pandemic.
- The interrelationship between authoritarianism and nationalism and the impact of the pandemic on this linkage.
- How the pandemic is shaping biases.
- Deglobalization and closure of borders.
- The role of fear.

In recent times nationalism is playing a vital role as most of the countries are governed by the right wing or far right wing governments as a result of which the political parties in various countries such as Donald Trumps “America First”, orthodox nationalism of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, preach of nationalism in Israel by Benjamin Netanyahu or be it the Vote Leave campaign for Brexit all are promoting an exclusionary nationalism policy. Thus the rise in the Right Wing governments has made the idea of exclusionary nationalism more widespread and also people have started to accept its ideologies in a more broadened way. Also the recent widespread of the Right Wing governments also illustrated how exclusionary nationalism is shaping the political agendas and ideologies in efficient ways.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7242772/>

Capitalism and COVID – 19

In this contemporary world as global nationalism faced a huge change in its structure because of the existing pandemic, capitalism also faced severe failures. Capitalism being an economic and political system in which country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit rather than the state in which the entire private industry is solemnly depended on strict labour work. Till now most of the critical junctures had an effect on the financial foundation of be it the nation or the globe. But COVID – 19 pandemic had an completely different approach, it affected people at large. The labour which is provided by the humans in the private sector is completely because of their health. As the pandemic crumbled down the health's of people all across the globe resulting in heaps of deaths together with affecting the economic and socio cultural life of the people, resulting in shutting down of the entire domestic and international market specially the private companies it felt like the backbone of capitalism has been broken down into pieces. Though the contemporary world was able to establish the fact that technology was superior as compared to human labour but as the pandemic took place it made sure that everyone realized that the kernel of human activity is intrinsically material and is embedded in the socio economic market of capitalism. The uncontrollable amounts of deaths at first place caused a huge damage due to which the companies where forced to being shut resulted in severe unemployment and wages being squeezed to their extent in order to overcome the companies losses affected capitalism in a drastic way. The crisis had a great impact on the everyday lifestyle due to which the regular graph or trend of production, marketing and consumption witnessed a havock change whether it be locally or globally and because of this capitalism faced a heavy fluctuation. Capitalism is such an approach that is not only depended on the private sector but also state has a major role to play in it. Till date we have seen that the pandemics or other natural disasters which came into existence the state did not play a vital role mostly the responsibility remained confined to the central government but COVID – 19 made sure that the state plays an essential role in fighting the pandemic. Since decades we have seen that the neoliberal ideology states quotes that, states has always been responsible for fixing the local issues of market and given more emphasis on political issues but now it was time for the states to fasten it seat belts and act as an efficient savior to take down the pandemic.

On 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID -19 as a

pandemic². The whole world came to a standstill as governments all around the world started to impose strict lockdowns creating few odd juxtapositions. Few of the problems that affected the most is first when countries announced nation wide lockdowns it hampered peoples of various work class in various ways. Unemployment became a serious issue. Job type is that factor which differentiated the effect of pandemic on the workers. People who had secured jobs and were owner of handsome waged sector were the least affected ones in terms of economy status. For them maintaining the required social distance, not stepping out of the houses and work from home was just a mere thing because they are the privileged part of the society. But the people who suffered the most is the people who are part of the middle – low waged sector as most of the middle waged sector people either lost their jobs because of the companies shutting down or had a major cutoff in their wage. The people who were a part of the low waged sector or people who worked on daily wage with uncertain jobs were the major people who stood unemployed when the pandemic took over the entire world. The people who worked as the frontline workers or the migrant workers who slept under the open sky with empty stomachs to be filled and stood unemployed because of the pandemic was exposed to the vulnerabilities of the virus. Thus this had a major effect on the capitalism as the economy was facing a major downfall due to huge amount of unemployment's and their was no way for replacement income. Secondly it was seen that countries had faced a serious failure in handling the pandemic at first place resulting in 103 million people affected all across the globe and 2.2 million deaths. Somewhere it was shocking to know that the most developed enriched countries like the United Nations failed to take control over the pandemic even they had the best of science technology and health infrastructure. On the other hand it was seen that the middle lower developing countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam etc had been successful in managing the pandemic more efficiently despite of not having the adequate amount of health infrastructure. As the rich developed countries faced a tragic death of lakhs of people a major downfall in the income was seen as compared to that of the middle lower developing countries which led to a study finding that the income inequality has decreased because of the pandemic as the national per capita income has fallen rapidly in high income countries than in middle low income countries when the per capita income is measured under population. Though a very restricted amount of issue is being discussed here which affected capitalism there are an enormous numbers of issues present and affecting the world capitalism. Now the only thing that has to be seen is how the post pandemic contemporary world shapes capitalism, as the

² <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

backbone that has made capitalism which is privatization has been severely affected and crumbled down.

The Vaccine Tragedy

Have you ever experienced a depressurizing plane? What happens when the oxygen mask drops? Our neurological senses us to help ourselves first and then look after others. “This reference was given by Peter Mark’s a senior official in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration who was in charge of the initial phases of the vaccine development for the U.S. government said in a panel discussion in June.” Trump administration officials had this rigid approach towards the COVID – 19 pandemic so did the other rich and developed countries like UK, France, Germany and other European countries also had a similar approach which led to the rise of the concept of “Vaccine Nationalism”. Vaccine Nationalism is also referred to as “My country first” that is when a country is successful in securing a whole lot of vaccine for it’s own residents and prioritizes it’s own domestic market rather than sharing it with other countries. In this the well doing developed countries enter into a contract with the COVID - 19 vaccine manufacturers which assures them that as soon as the 1st vaccine is out even if it is not an effective one it should be first served to those countries who have signed the pre purchased agreements with them. This allocation did not seem to be effective as it had harsh effect on the middle lower developing countries as they are forced to watch the wealthier countries seal the deal of vaccines and deplete supplies while they stand in a long que waiting for their turn. Hence this led to the death of the people of those unprotected countries increasing the death graph.

According to Arifinity, the analytics firm “The European States, Britain, US and Japan have gained a total of 1.3 billion doses of efficient COVID – 19 and the deals which have been still pending will add more 1.5 billion doses to their stock. The analysis also have added that US has already signed a deal with 6 of the manufacturers worth 800 million doses while UK with 5 manufacturers worth 250 million doses.³ All together it was seen that the US, UK, European States and Japan have invested 10 billion dollars with first vaccine developers such as Pfizer Inc, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca plc even before they could produce effective vaccines. Thus these inequalities had a harsh effect on the global health and economy. If we could look back at the previous pandemics we would obviously know that vaccine nationalism is not

³ <https://www.airfinity.com/areas/covid-19>

something new to us. It has been thriving in the system since years. For example during the HIV epidemic the middle low developing countries couldn't get their hands on the antiretroviral therapy because of the high prices that was fixed by the pharmaceutical industry. The same thing also happened during the H1N1 flu pandemic when Australia was the single country that came up with the vaccine and restricted rather ceased the exports of the vaccine. So in order to get their hands on the vaccine some developed countries signed pre purchased agreements in which U.S. alone got the right to own 600,000 doses of vaccine. Thus one major issue that needs to be rectified in this is that vaccine and other medical amenities should be treated as public essential goods and not as market goods. Epidemics and pandemics should be seen a severe crisis and not as a suitable time for extracting profits out of essential health amenities.

Hence a solution was needed immediately to curb out the interest of people at large. Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus the chief of WHO stated that, "We need to prevent Vaccine Nationalism. Sharing finite supplies strategically and globally is actually in each country's national interest". So in order to resolve the issue⁴ "United States under Joe Biden and the G7 nations along with other 80 potentially self financing countries, joining 92 low – middle income economies that are eligible to be supported by the COVAX program joined hands to be a active member of the COVID – 19 Vaccine Access Program (COVAX) led by Gavi, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO". Presently 172 economies are engaged with the program.

⁵What COVAX offers?

- To provide middle lower income countries with efficient supply of vaccines and also eye's to vaccinate 20 % of the population of the participating countries by the end of 2021 ". Hence this way atleast there would be no unequal distribution of vaccines around the globe.
- Diverse and actively managed portfolio of vaccines
- Vaccines delivered as soon as they are available.

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-08-2020-172-countries-and-multiple-candidate-vaccines-engaged-in-covid-19-vaccine-global-access-facility>

⁵ <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>

- End the acute phase of pandemic.
- To rebuild economies.

Thus initiatives like COVAX helps to accelerate the supply of vaccines equally all over the world. For example India has a hold on more amount of vaccines as compared to other middle – low income countries because of the partnership between AstraZeneca and Serum Institute of India, one of the major manufacturer. In this way the other pharmaceutical companies have also entered into several contracts with other manufactures. This led to the rise of another issue that is the prices of the vaccines. As various pharmaceutical companies tend to sign the agreements with manufacturers along with that came a hike of different prices that seemed to be expensive and hard to be afforded. So in order to resolve that issue India along with South Africa with the support of more than 90 countries placed the issue in front of the World Trade Organization to impose Trade – Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) wavier for COVID -19 vaccines so that the manufacturing costs would be reduced globally and also the vaccines would be under pharmaceutical patent protection. Thus in this way vaccination would reach the doorsteps of the entire world without being having to wait in the que that too in average market price.

Indian Economy due to COVID – 19 Pandemic

⁶The day when our Prime Minister announced a lockdown of 21 days people assumed that it would be a matter of 21 days only but our Prime Minister somewhere in his speech made us aware that this would have a devastating effect on the economy. Already the economy had faced a fluctuation during the 2016 Demonetization were 86% of the money was left unused overnight and now millions of people were left unemployed at the first place. The domestic market faced a drastic fall as public transport stood still, restaurants and shopping malls made zero profits because of the lack of customers, small business owners where left with nothing because of people switching to online shopping. Travel and tourism which is one of the main pillars of the Indian Economy was handicapped due to the strict restrictions of the lockdown and closing of the borders and ban on international flights. After the first lockdown within 7days Indian Rail activity was below 36%, oil demand was reduced by 70%, electricity demand also reduced by 30%. Unemployment rate saw a spiked by 19% just after a month of lockdown,

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7376361/>

whereas by 24th April India faced an unemployment rate 26%. The lockdown had a major impact on the medium and small enterprises setting the economy to dust. Another major section of people who lost their jobs are the daily wage workers and the migrant workers that also constitutes to an essential part of the economy. Though the government knew that the lockdown was having a severe and long term effect on the economy of the country but it was completely helpless as its hand were tied up with the shackles of COVID – 19.

India's Vaccine Policy.

Since day 1 when India was affected with the first case of COVID – 19 the government had already made up its mind to develop its own vaccine so that their citizens do not have to wait in the que in order to get vaccinated and also the other motive was to provide vaccines at affordable cost so that people of India could avail it easily. Since then the various pharmaceutical companies and medical institutions started to develop the vaccines. The development and trial of the vaccines are still going on at very fast pace. On 16th January 2021, the Government of India announced the world largest vaccination drive and the people to get vaccinated in order to break the dominance of the pandemic. A lot of vaccines were under trial but among them few of them stood effective. Among them some of the vaccines are developed by the local pharmaceutical industries and some of them are developed in collaboration foreign based vaccine developers. These collaborations range from trails of the vaccines, to manufacturing and distributions of vaccines. Some of them are –

- Covishield by the Serum Institute of India in collaboration with manufacturers such as Oxford AstraZeneca, Codagenix and Novavax.
- Covaxin by Bharat Biotech Ltd is India's first own domestic vaccine developed in collaboration with the National Institute of Virology of ICMR.
- Sputnik – V by the Gamalaya National Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology of Moscow, Russia along with Dr Reddy's Laboratories in Hyderabad which received approval from the DCGI to conduct human stage vaccine trial for Sputnik – V in India.
- mRNA vaccine still unnamed by Gennova Biopharmaceutical Ltd in collaboration with HDT Biotech Corporation, USA.

- COVID vaccine still unnamed by Biological E Ltd in collaboration with Dynavax Technologies Corporation and Baylor College of Medicine.

⁷The government of India has also constructed a team that is National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID – 19 (NEGVAC). This team figures out in which way the vaccination process will roll out in the market and which sector of people should be prioritised first to receive the vaccine. The Government has secured to get hands on somewhat 600 million doses of vaccine from the above mentioned vaccines and is continuously searching the way out for another billion doses of vaccine. The vaccine Covaxin and Covishield are the two efficient drugs that got approved for emergency use as the companies had applied for “emergency use authorization” for their vaccines.

⁸As the government started to develop vaccines it only kept it with itself but also extended its helping hand to the foreign countries. Even when there was no vaccine against the virus Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) was the effective drug that could boost the immunity of the frontline workers and as India owned a handsome amount of that specific drug it showed on hesitations in order to export them to the international borders. In the first speech of our Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the UN after India’s election in the Security Council for 2021 – 22 he stated that, “ Be it earthquakes, cyclone, Ebola crisis or any other natural or man – made crisis, India has responded with speed and solidarity. In our joint fight against the COVID – 19 we have extended medical help and assistance to over 150 countries ”. He also stated that, “COVID – 19 pandemic has tested severely the resilience of all nations. In India we tried to make the fight against the pandemic a people’s movement by combining the efforts of Government and Civil society ”. ⁹But just when India projected its generosity to the entire world the second wave of COVID – 19 devastated India. So in order to cope up with the situation India requested aid from the foreign countries. Countries like, U.S., UAE, France, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and countries all over the world are extending their helping hand to us. Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla stated that, “India had supplied essential pharma products, including Hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir as well as vaccines. We have assisted other countries and we are getting assistance now”. As there has been oxygen crisis in the second wave “India will be getting 550 oxygen generating plants, 4000 oxygen

⁷ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41541-021-00327-2>

⁸ <https://health.economictimes.indiatimes.com/amp/news/policy/india-has-extended-assistance-to-over-150-countries-in-fight-against-covid-19-pm-modi/77028422>

⁹ <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/amp/india-accepts-foreign-aid-after-a-show-of-generosity/381591>

concentrators, 10,000 oxygen cylinders. The average production of the anti – viral drug Remdesivir is about 67,000 doses a day but as the demand is high due to the crisis India will be receiving 4 lakh doses free of cost from the American Company, Gilead Sciences.” Thus India showed the entire world how generosity can help us cope up with the pandemic and that we must be standing united as one.

Conclusion

When the world opted for Vaccine Nationalism, it was only India who stood strong with its Sanatan Ideology which is “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”. “Vasudha” means “earth”, “iva” means “is” and “kutumbakam” means “family”. The Sanskrit phrase means the whole world is one single family. The world is like a small, tightly knit, nuclear family. When the deadly pandemic took all over the world it left everyone devastated and people had no armours to fight it. The only armour that every people and government possessed to fight the pandemic is cooperation and to stand united. Every study every analysis that was projected against how to fight this pandemic it had one thing in common that is to treat this pandemic as one diseases and not to treat it as a disease of separate nations. In this case India stood as an example for the entire world. It enlightened the world with its eternal teachings of the Upanishads. The word “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” comes from the mantra VI – 72 of the Maha Upanishads which belongs to the Samaveda Tradition. The mantra reads

“Ayam nijah paroveti ganana laghuchetasam

Udaracharitanam tu Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”.

The distinction is “ This is my own and that is a stranger – is the calculation of narrow – minded.

For the magnanimous hearts however, the entire earth is but a family ”.

The Upanishad mantra is not a geo – politico – socio – cultural statement. It is a matter of fact. As the pandemic consumes us the phrase “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” reminds us that it is not only about peace and harmony among the societies in the world but also about a truth that the whole world has to live like a family. Thus if we try to implement this practice in our daily lives we can make this world a better place to live.