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COVID-19 and its Various Impacts

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Abstract

The journal Space and Culture, India, launched in 2013, has become ten years old, and the whole year has been dedicated to celebrating its birthday. This issue, Volume 10, Number 3, is a special issue on COVID-19, which brought the world to a standstill. Executed under the leadership of Professor Venkat Rao Pulla, the issue disseminates tales of the impact of COVID-19 worldwide, resilience and coping strategies.

Keywords: COVID-19; Lockdown; Civil Society Organisations; Globalisation; Race; Trauma; Ethnicity; SAARC Countries; Ubuntu; South Africa

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Introduction

We are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the journal, Space and Culture, India, which is another special issue on the impact of Covid-19 in many parts of the world. This special issue is under the leadership of Professor Venkat Rao Pulla.

During my time as an undergraduate student, Covid-19 certainly affected my university experience, starting midway through my second year and onwards. I was studying an integrated Master's course (with a Year Abroad) in Physics at Imperial College, London. Just before the first lockdown in the UK in March 2020, I was co-directing a musical group, and we were supposed to perform our act at Imperial Indian Society's flagship event called "East Meets West". Sadly, after many months of rehearsals, our show had to get cancelled due to Covid-19 safety restrictions, understandably. Following this, many of us students rushed to get home; UK home students left before public transport services reduced their operation, and international students hurried before the borders closed. Some of my international friends made it to their home countries just in the nick of time, whilst others were trapped in the UK, isolated from friends and family. It was uncertain how long this first lockdown, and this pandemic in general, was to last. Soon enough, we received the news that exams would be held remotely. This itself posed many challenges and problems. It is fair to say that the first round of online exams was a steep learning curve for both the university and the students.

The pandemic and its safety restrictions lasted all throughout my third year; hence all university teaching was carried out remotely at Imperial through the use of pre-recorded lectures. Many of my international friends stayed in their respective countries for the whole year, still paying rent in the UK in some cases. A popular complaint among the students was that this specific year just seemed like an overpriced "Netflix" subscription, as many felt they were not receiving the value of what they were paying for. On the other hand, I was fortunate enough that my Year Abroad still went ahead, and I got to spend my third year at EPFL (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in Lausanne, Switzerland. Although I was able to move there, my classes swiftly moved from being delivered in-person to being delivered via Zoom. I faced the same issues as my peers at Imperial with respect to the online delivery of lectures. Online lectures not only took longer to get through but were less engaging, and there were fewer opportunities to ask questions and interact with the lecturer as well as our peers. Just like lectures, I had to carry out my entire Master's level project at CERN remotely too. Unfortunately, Covid-19 robbed me of the opportunity to visit this magnificent experiment site for Particle Physics.

At times, there were feelings of isolation and, consequently, loss of focus and motivation to study. There was also much anxiety from the news and concern for the vulnerable and elderly family members. To top it off, all of this was coupled with academic pressure. There were countless other issues, such as the business of travelling becoming increasingly expensive with numerous mandatory Covid-19 tests that were costly and the requirement of increased travel documentation. But I would like to point out that these were all issues I faced coming from my privileged background. Many others, in far less privileged positions than me have experienced even more dire consequences of the pandemic, some of which are explored in this special issue of the journal.

One such group of people who the consequences of Covid-19 have severely impacted are victims of domestic violence. During the initial UK lockdowns, the domestic abuse charity named Refuge reported a 700% increase in calls from victims in a single day (The Guardian, 2020). Indeed, domestic and other forms of violence against women became rampant during the pandemic, and the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuk, referred to this burgeoning violence against women worldwide as a 'shadow pandemic' (UN Women, 2020; see also, Singh

and Bhattacharyya, 2020). Some other issues that made media headlines in the developed world are death statistics due to the pandemic (Coronavirus Research Centre, John Hopkins University, n.d.), job loss, empty supermarket shelves and tug of war over toilet tissues (Moore, 2020). The problems encountered by the people of the developing world are in some ways similar to those of the developed world, albeit the people of the developing world are understandably far more resilient than those of the developed world. However, the problems that took centre stage during the pandemic in countries like India are the labour migrant crisis, poor people being pushed further into the scourge of extreme forms of multi-dimensional poverty etc. (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020).

The articles in this issue cover a variety of different angles on the Covid-19 pandemic. Some articles are based on different vulnerable groups experiencing various traumas. A common theme shared by these studies are of having a sense of community, community solidarity, having a collection of beliefs with a spiritual foundation being the means of healing their trauma and improving one's mental and psychological well-being during the pandemic. Other articles focus on how the pandemic highlighted the great inequalities between different social and ethnic groups in societies around the world, revealing large disparities in healthcare and socioeconomic well-being, and increased levels of racism. A few articles assess the impact and handling of the Covid-19 crisis in different parts of the world whilst some articles address and explore the role that social workers and civil society organisations played in delivering humanitarian aid in their respective countries. The following section gives an overview of the articles included in this special issue.

COVID-19 and its Impact

The article entitled *Race and Ethnicity in the Pandemic* explores the issues associated with it in relation to the pandemic using examples and analyses from around the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has been one of the significant factors that brought to light the health disparities between different races and ethnicities; specifically, how those from non-white backgrounds suffered from devastating impacts on health as well as experiencing increased levels of racism during the pandemic, with certain ethnic groups being accused of spreading the virus.

In her article, *Writing in the time of COVID-19: The threads that bind and tear asunder*, the author draws on the intersection of the micro and macro dynamics of the pandemic. While so doing, she explores the impacts and consequences of lockdown and social distancing on people, communities and governments. In particular, the author discusses how the pandemic highlighted the inequalities between different social and ethnic groups in society.

The study titled *Ubuntu and COVID-19 in South Africa: Surviving the Pandemic through Community Solidarity* explores the role the African philosophical concept of *ubuntu* played in creating community solidarity in South Africa during the pandemic, and how this was a means of dealing with the pandemic. The concept of *ubuntu* is commonly translated as "I am because we are" and is related to invoking a sense of community spirit, which the authors argue results in social protection. From their analysis using academic literature and newspapers viewed through the lens of *ubuntu* concepts, the authors argue that the concept of *ubuntu* is a relevant worldview, applicable not only during the pandemic but also in other aspects of life.

The study titled *Civil Society Shifts, Challenges and Responses to COVID-19: Ireland, Scotland and Wales* investigated how civil society organisations (CSOs) handled the lockdowns in these countries and to what extent they felt threatened during the pandemic. The authors interviewed three CSOs from Ireland, Scotland and Wales to learn about their experiences, particularly concerning their political reactions and social dynamics, as CSOs are bodies through which people have the power to make a difference through social change. From this study, the authors found that the pandemic reduced the power and influence CSOs had on

their politicians and societies, as well as their ability to influence social change.

The authors in their study, *Working with Young Children in a New World Replete with Assumptions*, first, explores how a collection of beliefs with a spiritual foundation can help people to cope with and heal from trauma and in general better one's psychological well-being. In this context, the authors focus on the relationship between teachers and young pupils as they navigated their way through the pandemic; teachers often experienced negative behavioural changes in their young students, having to handle their students' trauma as well as their own. The authors express that if teachers can create a safe space where their students can freely express their emotions, it creates an environment of healing and growth in psychological well-being not only for the students but also for the teachers themselves.

The title, *The Light Inside: A Reflection on an Art Program, Traumatised Women and Thriving during the 2020 Pandemic,* reflects on how an art service provided by the author to a group of traumatised women in Melbourne with related mental health issues and other disabilities helped them through the pandemic. The women are recipients of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding. The author explores the impacts of Covid-19 on her women participants and, subsequently, how the NDIS funding and the art service, with its newfound community support, enabled the women to remain resilient through the pandemic and lessen its negative impacts.

The study, *Managing the Pandemic in the South Asian (SAARC) Countries,* discusses the pandemic's impact on these countries and their responses from a South Asian point of view. The authors draw on insights from academics and social workers based in the SAARC countries, and they discuss each country's challenges, use of lockdowns, vaccines, PPE, and the spirit of cooperation by these countries. The authors also focus on the role India played with respect to its vaccination programme and "neighbourhood first" policy, along with India's relationship with the other SAARC countries.

The article entitled *The Pandemic in the Himalayan Country: Nepal* discusses the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on Nepal's economy, which is already a country that is prone to natural disasters, still recovering socioeconomically from the 2015 earthquake. Global travel restrictions took a toll on Nepal's tourism industry, with many people losing their jobs. The authors address the Government's numerous attempts to boost the tourism sector, with domestic tourism saving the industry from totally collapsing. In general, lockdowns and other public health restrictions forced Nepal's migrant workforce to eventually lose their incomes, forcing many to return to their respective home countries. Similarly, Nepali migrant workers in foreign countries lost their jobs and returned to Nepal, affecting the remittance flow. Finally, the authors describe the Nepalese people's resilience and their endeavours to deal with the pandemic.

In the penultimate article entitled *The Not-So-Silent Rise of Nationalism: A COVID-19 Result,* the author has discussed how levels of nationalism increased and manifested in forms such as vaccine wars and vaccine hoarding. Not only this, but there were also many displays by countries of accusations, lack of cooperation, scientific divisions, poor conduct by political figures, and lack of transparency in reporting statistics, to name a few.

The authors in the final article, *Globalisation: Rethinking Development in the Context of the Pandemic,* of this issue discuss how cities which exhibited high levels of development, urbanisation and industrialisation commonly formed the hotspots for the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The authors discuss the impacts of this crisis on such globalised economies. They argue that the density of these places as a result of population and global interconnectivity, has made such cities more prone to the spread of the virus. The authors argue that development plans for the urbanisation of cities must account for such factors that promoted the spread of the virus so that any future pandemics are handled in a better way.

Conclusion

As we all know, Covid-19 has impacted the whole world, from the individual to the global scale. The nuances of the ramifications of Covid-19 discussed in this issue could lead to a better understanding of its consequences on human civilisation and better management of future pandemics.

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About the Author

Maitreyee graduated from Imperial College London with an MSci Physics degree. She spent her third year on a student exchange programme at EPFL (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in Lausanne, Switzerland. There, she carried out her Master's project at CERN, working with the CERN Collimation team under the supervision of Roderik Bruce (CERN) and Tatiana Pieloni (EPFL-LPAP) on the design of the collimation system for the Future Circular Collider (FCC-ee). Her Master's thesis was titled *First Studies of the Halo Collimation Needs in the FCC-ee* and was subsequently published on the CERN Document Server.[1] Maitreyee is now pursuing her doctoral studies at the University of Manchester in the Particle Physics group. Her supervisor is Professor Justin Evans. Under his guidance, Maitreyee is working in the field of Neutrino Physics on the MicroBooNE experiment, which is based at Fermilab, Chicago.

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[1] http://cds.cern.ch/record/2808768?ln=en