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Covid: Glimpses of Indian political scene amid mayhem | Pramod Ranjan

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by Pramod Ranjan *

Even as I write these lines in the last week of April 2021, many cities and towns across various states in India have been locked down again. This is the second wave of lockdowns though the first lockdown had never actually ended. A range of restrictions have been put in place in almost all parts of the country. Inter-state travel has come to a virtual standstill. Only a few Covid-special trains are operating. Crores of the poor have lost their livelihoods even as the billionaires have gotten richer.

Despite that, this week, India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress had criticized the Government of India for not opening vaccinations to all adults. 'Vaccine for all' means to surreptitiously approve mandatory vaccination, which gives validity to the ideas like vaccine passport. The Congress had also demanded that the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) should postpone class 12 and class 10 examinations. [1] The Congress is claiming that it was due to its demand that the Class 10 examinations have been cancelled and Class 12 examinations have been postponed.

The Congress is supportive of lockdowns, online teaching and mandatory vaccine-passports. And why not. After all, it was the Congress-led government which, despite strong protests, had made biometrics-based identity cards compulsory for all Indians. Vaccine passport is the next logical step in the same direction.

The Congress has also demanded a moratorium on export of vaccines. It wants that until all Indians are inoculated, India should not provide vaccines to other countries and till then, in-person teaching should not be resumed. It may be mentioned here that India is the biggest producer of vaccines in the world and all educational institutions in the country are shut since March 2020.

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Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had recently written to the Prime Minister demanding fast-track approval to vaccines cleared by other countries. Reacting to it, Union Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ravishankar Prasad had expressed the suspicion that Rahul was lobbying for foreign vaccine-makers [2]. The Congress claims that the government has accepted this demand, too.

On the face of it, it may seem as if the policies of the Congress vis-à-vis online teaching, vaccination etc. are fundamentally different from those of the BJP-led government and that is why the party is raising different demands.

But the question is who wants to bring the educational system back on the rails? Does the Government of India want it? Does the Congress want it? The fact is that both are unanimous that education should be made online. The government had started taking steps in that direction some time before the pandemic. The Congress's only objection is that students living in far-off places do not have access to mobile phones and computers. Otherwise the party is supportive of efforts in that direction in every possible manner provided the government arranges electronic gadgets for free for students living in far-off places. [3] Neither the government nor the Congress is worried that moving towards online education implies the end of the process of teaching socialization to students and adding colour to their life, which takes place in physical campuses of educational institutions.

As for the so-called vaccine-nationalism and vaccine-diplomacy, the Congress is opposing export of vaccines. But the question is which countries are willing to buy vaccines from us? Which developed and prosperous country has sought our vaccines? The fact is that many countries have refused to have anything to do with Indian vaccines. Some countries have decided to return vaccines [4] produced in India saying that they are not effective and have many side-effects.

The Indian government's so-called 'vaccine diplomacy' is like gifting an old unproductive cow to a Brahmin.

Vaccine diplomacy is also part of a corporate strategy of creating an artificial shortage of the vaccine to attract people towards it. Marketing Gurus have a specific word for this strategy. It is called 'Scarcity Heuristic'. Behavioural Economists discuss this concept in detail. It is an old and time-tested marketing strategy. Scarcity heuristic stems from the idea that the more difficult it is to acquire an item, the more valuable it becomes in popular perception. It banks on the psychological reaction to the scarcity of an item. An article published recently in the 'Scientific American' magazine shows how this vintage marketing trick is persuading people to go for vaccination. The magazine says that the Blacks were very skeptical of the vaccine but when they came across data suggesting that it was more easily available to the Whites, there was a perceptible jump in the percentage of Blacks willing to get vaccinated. [5] The daily press briefings by the World Health Organization (WHO) betray the efforts to take scarcity heuristics to hysterical levels. The WHO chief Dr Tedros regularly presents data showing that the rich nations have cornered a major share of the vaccine supplies, leaving the developing and the poor nations high and dry. Of course, he does not talk about people not wanting to take vaccines and neither does he say anything on how doubtful the success of these vaccines is. They very conveniently gloss over the fact that no effective vaccine has been developed so far and the global vaccination campaign is just an experiment on the people. Some super corporations, which want to make the world their hostage, are using their formidable lobbying groups to build an atmosphere in favour of these vaccines.

The fact is that there is no shortage of vaccines. These vaccines can be mass-produced very easily. But the super corporations and pharma giants are using Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) claims to block mass production. Bill Gates and his associates have investments in all these companies. Bill Gates also dominates the WHO [6]. His organization, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has been charged with controlling India's health policies from behind the curtain. These organisations have very cordial relations with top BJP leaders, as cordial as they had with the top Congress leaders when that party was in power [7].

Covid vaccine is the first product in the history of business and commerce, which has been declared essential for every person on this earth. No other product had ever created such enormous commercial opportunities.

At the same time, there are a large number of people in the world who are neither getting themselves vaccinated nor want to. They want their governments to stop repressive actions in the name of their welfare. But a psychological war has been launched to change the mindset of the people. The chief players in this war, which is being waged at many levels, are IT and social media companies.

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To understand the level to which this unilateral war has reached, one needs to look at the strategies of the WHO in this regard.

For some time, the WHO has been saying that thinking independently and taking independent decisions is a disease, which is more dangerous than Covid-19. The world body calls it 'Infodemic'.

The WHO convened a series of closed-door meetings between June 30 and July 16, 2020 with representatives of tech companies, psychologists and doctors to win in-principle approval for the existence of the 'Infodemic' disease. These secret conclaves were attended by experts in the fields of public health, applied mathematics, data science, digital health, technology applications, social and behavioural sciences and media studies, besides marketing gurus and representatives of many governments.

In these meetings, it was decided to name the process of treating the disease of infodemics as 'Infodemiology'. It was described as a new science and it was decided to develop it as a branch of medical science. [8] Since then, we all are under treatment. We are being treated to improve our thinking, to make us believe what they want us to believe and to persuade us to meekly accept their conclusions. This is being done openly and officially. Our personal data, compiled by the tech companies, is being used extensively in this treatment. Now since 'Infodemiology' has been declared a branch of medical science it is bound to be taught in medical schools and soon we will have specialists in it. As Yuval Noah Harari has been saying in his books, biology has reached to a level where this new branch of medicine can well propose medicines for neutralizing human emotions, including logic, reasoning and resistance.

But despite this treatment, different surveys show that even now, 50-90 per cent of the people in various countries do not have faith in the vaccines [9]. The number of those who believe that this disease has spawned exaggerated and disproportionate fears is also rising.

Despite stringent epidemic laws and rules, many countries have witnessed demonstrations against vaccines and lockdowns. Though India has not seen public expressions of anger, people are voicing their opposition at the personal level. They are unwilling to wear masks and, fairs and social functions are drawing huge crowds. Markets are overflowing with shoppers. No one is ready to listen to the TV channels, which are constantly complaining of 'social distancing norms being thrown to the wind'. Those who are wearing masks are doing so not because they fear the disease but because they fear the rules and the laws imposed by the government.

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At the same time, news of vaccinations causing deaths and other ill-effects are being kept under the wraps by invoking epidemic control laws. Vaccination was launched in India on 16 January 2021. Reports of the jabs causing deaths started coming in almost immediately thereafter. There were reports of at least a dozen deaths in the first three days. But then, suddenly, such reports vanished from the media. The vaccine was the same. Then how come its ill-effects ceased suddenly? To get the answer to this question, you would have to understand how media institutions are forced by their inherent weaknesses to toe the line of the governments and the so-called specialist institutions. Then, there is the stick of the Disaster Management Act to deal with those who refuse to fall in line.

The vaccine is still killing people. And these are eminently avoidable deaths. The media has stopped reporting vaccination-related deaths. But still, the people are not coming forward to get vaccinated. The Indian state where I live went to the polls recently. At a meeting of government officials selected for poll-related duties, the district collector offered to get them vaccinated, irrespective of their age. But barely 10 of the 150 persons present volunteered.

Vaccines similar to the ones that are being praised sky high in India have been banned by many European nations following deaths of recipients due to blood clotting.

Russia was the first to come out with a Covid vaccine. In August 2020, Russian President Vladimir Putin's daughter Katerina Tikhonova took the vaccine. At that time, many uncharitable things were said about the Russian vaccine in India and in many European nations. The WHO also issued statements seeking to give a bad name to the vaccine. It was said that the "Russian vaccine is a sham; that taking advantage of the pandemic, Russia is trying to sell a vaccine which not only has no benefits but also has serious side-effects."

The same Russian vaccine is now being described as effective. India has also allowed its use in the country. What is all this? What game is being played? The way our hard-earned money, paid as tax, is being wasted in the name of the epidemic is a global racket of unprecedented magnitude.

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The nation-wide lockdowns last year had dragged crores of Indians into the morass of debt. And now has come the second wave of lockdowns. Banks are taking coercive action against loan defaulters. Unable to bear the pressure being mounted by the banks and other lending institutions, thousands (may be lakhs) have committed suicide. Lakhs of people are writing on Twitter that the way they are being pressurized by these institutions, they have no option but to end their life. The Supreme Court was approached by some of the creditors, seeking moratorium on loan repayment. But the Court did not give any relief to them. That was because the government argued that the interests of the creditors also needed to be protected [10] otherwise the rich would lose faith in these institutions. The Supreme Court accepted the government's argument. However, neither the ruling party nor the opposition was concerned about the people's faith in these institutions. In fact, no political party is standing by the 'loan-hungry middle class'.

Be that as it may, let us return to the original question – why is the main opposition Congress raising demands on issues on which it has no difference of opinion with the Government of India?

It is not that the Congress is unaware of the situation. Every day, hundreds of people are tagging Rahul Gandhi on Twitter, saying that they are being driven to suicide. The desperation and the helplessness of the correspondents is very palpable. They are not people who want to gobble up the money loaned to them. They are self-respecting citizens who are making their living by the sweat of their brow. Government policies have crushed their self-respect. Banks are seizing their household goods. Musclemen hired by the lenders are thrashing them in the presence of their wives and children. The police are refusing to intervene. [11]

Amid this mayhem, the Congress is maintaining a stoic silence. Why has it failed to take a stand on the issue? That is because it has no basic differences with the BJP. It knows that the policies of the Government of India are not contradictory to its own policies. It doesn't think that the way people all over the world are being made to suffer in the name of the pandemic is inhuman. Instead, the Grand Old Party of India is

concerned why the policies that seek to convert humans into robots, into slaves of the government; that make a mockery of democracy and give corporate houses a direct say in matters of governance, are not being implemented with alacrity.

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There is another way of looking at the going-on. In the name of the pandemic, crores of Indian middle-class persons have been pushed into poverty. After a long and bitter struggle, the fruits of democracy had started reaching the majority of Indians. Over the past few decades, they had started enjoying political freedom and crores of the poor had joined the ranks of the middle class. In the same period, government jobs and institutions of higher learning became accessible to the biggest chunk of the Indian people — known as Other Backward Classes or OBCs. That was why, despite all kinds of shortcomings, a majority of Indians have developed complete faith in democracy and in the government elected by them. But there are forces which, while maintaining the sham of democracy, want to build a global economic empire in which currency is controlled not by the nation-states but by corporates. These forces are taking advantage of the common man's faith in democracy. The system which runs the administration is under their influence. The salaried class, professionals and bureaucrats together constitute the middle-class, which is supposed to give direction to the political leadership. In countries like India, thanks to dynasticism, people of sharp intellect and firm resolve are hardly interested in politics. This trend has robbed democracy of much of its strength. This has happened due to different reasons in different countries but the Indian National Congress, controlled by a dynasty, is symbolic of what has become of democracy in India. There are numerous such examples in the Third World and especially in south Asia.

Be that as it may; the Congress is as much responsible as the policies of the government for the current situation in India. Had the Congress taken a humanistic stand on the pandemic and opposed the anti-people policies of the government, the country would not have faced as much ruin as it is facing. But that did not happen. There might be some differences in the social background of the Congress and the BJP voters but both the parties have similar or rather same cultural and economic policies. It is our misfortune that barring the Communist parties, all other political outfits in India have the same economic policies. As for cultural policies, even the Communist parties are no different.

No Indian political party has clarified its stand on the tragedy that is unfolding in India and the world. They have confined themselves to routine criticism of the ruling party. None of them have any original ideas or vision.

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It is now too late to raise fundamental questions regarding Covid. What had begun as an epidemic has become a question of faith. Over the past one year, I have written many articles on the issue. Now, I tell my friends that like god and ghosts, Covid is also a matter of faith and belief. At the risk of being jailed, one can write against the prevailing views on the matter but discussing it in society, among friends, has been made impossible. Truth, reason and logic have got crushed under the enormous mountain of false, misleading and bogus facts. In this dark cemetery of science stands a tall lamppost which is being touted as the sole source of the light of knowledge. The lamppost, which is under the protection of the bayonets of state power, is only disseminating what the corporate giants and the specialist individuals and organizations want us to understand and believe.

No matter how it all began, it is now clear that a well-planned effort is being made to make science a matter of faith. And tech-based alchemy is being used in a big way towards this end. Anmol Ambani, the son of Indian billionaire Anil Ambani, said recently that Covid is not a Pandemic but a 'Scamdemic'. According to him, a well-organized conspiracy is being hatched to bring about a new world order. And many corporations and top politicians are party to this conspiracy.

The Ambani family owns the Reliance Group and is among the richest families of the world. Anmol Ambani, director of Reliance Capital, has the image of a media-shy billionaire.

Anmol's tweets describing Covid as a 'scamdemic' instead of pandemic are being attributed variously to his idiocy and leftist leanings. [12] It is ironic that while on the one hand, the Left parties are indirectly or directly backing the policies aimed at enslaving people, on the other hand, the media is putting the young son of a billionaire in the dock for being influenced by the Left! The intellectuals associated with the Congress and Socialism are describing him as a BJP supporter.

Anmol must be having more authentic knowledge about what is happening behind the curtains in the corporate world. His comments may have been guided by his perception of loss or profit but as Chanchal Chauhan, an office-bearer of Janwadi Lekhak Sangh,

the organization of writers associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) reminds us, sometimes a section of the capitalist class and some individuals tell the truth from inside. F. Engels himself was an industrialist, but became the most intelligent Marxist and Jamshetji Tata's sister's son, Shapurji Saklatvala (1874–1932) who was sent to England for managing Tata's Manchester office became the member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and was elected as Member of the British Parliament (1924–1929). He writes, "Anil Ambani's son may not be a Communist tomorrow, but today he is seeing with his own eyes the glaring truth of Indian ruling classes that under the hegemony of the International Finance Capital are turning fascists shamelessly without caring for any dissent, any agitation or any good suggestion for the well-being of Indian people. This is happening in some other countries too. [13]" (Emphasis ours)

Anmol recently tweeted, "Covid is the new dogmatic religious cult of our times." The BJP feels that expansion of this cult would benefit it. The Congress wants to ensure that unlike Ram Mandir, it should not lag behind in supporting this new religion. What should be done in such a confusing situation? You can well ask whom one should believe and whom one should disbelieve. The answer is a well-known statement by Noam Chomsky, which has been retweeted by Anmol Ambani in the context of Covid. Chomsky says, "Nobody is going to pour truth into your brain. It's something you have to find out for yourself."

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