



## It's Carnage in India

I write from the national capital of India, Delhi while recovering from Covid-19. It is hard to put into words what we have been witnessing in India. There is sickness in the air and death everywhere.

For weeks now India is setting a new world record every day for the highest single day spikes of Covid-19. Over 400,000 fresh cases are being reported regularly, the unofficial number is expected to be much higher.

In Delhi, Covid has touched almost every second household. Three members of my own family are Covid positive right now with some close relatives critical and on continuous oxygen support. Only a week ago my paternal aunt tested positive for Covid and just a few days later her oxygen levels started dipping. An oxygen concentrator was arranged for her after six hours of continuous struggle. She is critical and now hospitalised.

Every time the phone rings or any notification arrives, we fear if there's news from relatives, friends, acquaintances about a departed one and that is the case with millions of people here. We are all grieving! Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter all have become unofficial Covid helplines. People are begging on social media for help.

The magnitude of devastation could be understood by the fact that the wealthy people including those with contacts in bureaucracy are putting SOS messages on social media for help. They do manage to get help but that's not the case for millions and millions of people. Most here are begging for oxygen cylinders and hospital beds with many dying on the streets and at the gates of the hospitals gasping for breath. The struggle does not end at getting an oxygen bed in hospital, the situation here is so grim that even the major hospitals are sending SOS messages to the government for the replenishment of their oxygen supplies. Within a week, over 60 Covid patients in three big private hospitals of Delhi died because of depleted oxygen supply. On 4<sup>th</sup> May, 41 hospitals in Delhi sent SOS messages to the government. This is the situation of the national capital of India. What is happening in smaller cities is hard to fathom.

In most of the hospitals, people are compelled to sign forms and to give consent that if the patient dies due to lack of oxygen it would not be the liability of the hospital or state. Some hospitals have asked patients to arrange their own oxygen. The official number of deaths per day is around 4,000 but according to journalists and people working on the ground the actual daily death toll is over 40,000; ten times higher than what is being reported by the government!

Dead bodies are piling up; crematoriums have run out of spaces. Funerals are now happening in parks. The wood used in pyres is depleting as there are more dead bodies than wood in crematoriums. The forest department has to grant special permission to cut trees for pyres. People are dying without getting any treatment and because of the lack of something as basic as oxygen, this is no less than a state sponsored genocide. It's like a holocaust has been unleashed upon us in India.

### **A Billion People Pushed into an Apocalypse**

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, PM Narendra Modi announced the most stringent lockdown in the world which lasted for months with just four hours notice and with no plans of how the government will deal with the sudden closing of the economy. This unexpected lockdown

created chaos as hundreds of millions of people, mostly on daily wages, lost their jobs overnight and were left stranded on streets with no food or any means to travel back to their native villages. This resulted in mass exodus of migrant-workers with hundreds of people dying on the way and thousands starving to death. This is just a glimpse into the world's largest democracy which has miserably failed its people on a systematic level.

The first wave exposed that our healthcare infrastructure is in shambles, doctors were facing acute shortage of PPE and masks. In order to develop Covid specific infrastructure, millions of rupees were collected in the name of 'PM CARES' fund. A year later no Covid preparedness can be seen anywhere. People are begging for hospital beds, medicines and even oxygen!

The first wave badly affected India (India was the third worst affected country) and then it subsided. Despite repeated warnings by the experts regarding the second wave, in January 2021 at the World Economic Forum (WEF), PM Modi declared victory against the coronavirus. Combating Covid was never the regimes major concern, and it is quite evident from the fact that they did nothing in a year to prepare for the second wave. In early March 2020, a forum of scientists, warned the government of a new and more contagious variant of Covid, but the government paid no heed and left a population of over 1.3 billion people at the mercy of their immunity to protect themselves against a deadly contagion.

In democracies, the major concern for any political party is to get into power. In India's highly communal society, the ruling establishment knows that they will continue to win elections as long as they keep pushing their Hindutva agenda. Thus, even in the midst of the second wave, when the cases were skyrocketing, reaching over 200,000 the megalomaniac PM was busy conducting massive election rallies with hundreds and thousands of unmasked people with no social distancing in attendance. In Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal where election rallies were held, every second person tested, was Covid positive. West Bengal is expected to become a new Covid hotspot.

Even with the massive surge in Covid cases, the Kumbh Mela (Hindu religious gathering) was organised in April where millions of people gathered together to bathe in the river Ganges. Most of the Kumbh returnees became Covid positive. The Kumbh Mela and election rallies proved to be corona super spreader events, but unlike what happened with Tablighi Jamaat (who were vilified and demonised for months), the mainstream media has not even criticised the massive election rallies and melas in the middle of second wave.

### **The World's Largest Democracy is the World's Largest Fraud**

In 2020 from 13th to 15th March, before the lockdown was announced, Tablighi Jamaat held a conference in New Delhi. Some members of Tablighi Jamaat tested positive for Covid, for over a month mainstream media ran campaigns against Muslims and labelled them "corona super spreaders or corona bombs," hashtags such as "corona jihad" (signifying that Muslims were deliberately spreading the coronavirus) were trending on Twitter. First Incident Report FIRs were lodged against members of Tablighi Jamaat and some were jailed for months. The entire Muslim community was vilified. The poor Muslim vendors were harassed and faced economic boycott where they were even denied entry into non-Muslim localities. The nationalist Hindutva government and a large section of media that works for them found scapegoats and blamed Muslims for the spread of virus during the first wave. It was guilt by association.

Though nobody ever imagined the magnitude of devastation the second wave would bring, but Muslims of India are not surprised by Modi's epic failure to handle the pandemic. He was elected only because of his divisive politics. Muslims from India, who have resided here for decades know their lives are of no value here. Just last year we witnessed the anti-

Muslim citizenship law and Muslims from all over the country came out on streets to protest against it. This resulted in an anti-Muslim pogrom in east Delhi where Hindu vigilante mobs backed by the police slaughtered Muslims in broad daylight. Muslim youth including students and activists were falsely accused of rioting and are still languishing in prisons.

Muslims are being lynched at unprecedented levels, forget about perpetrators being brought to justice, the killings and sufferings of Muslims not just in India but anywhere else in the world is celebrated here by a major section of the society. A recent example of this were the hashtags "India stands with Israel" trending when the Zionists attacked Masjid al-Aqsa.

Now, with all the dead bodies of their loved ones piling up, because of the devastating second wave, there is anger and frustration amongst the general Hindu population against the government, but the implications of this remains to be seen as the collective hatred for Muslims due to communal politics whitewashes everything else in this country.

Efforts to communalise the second wave have already begun. At a Covid war room of over 200 people, BJP MP Tejaswi Surya singled out 17 Muslim staff members and accused them of running a bed blocking scam.

While the entire country is grief stricken and is struggling to find spaces to cremate its dead, construction of a new parliament, Central Vista, (\$2 billion project) has begun and has been declared as an essential service by the Modi government.

It is quite evident that in democracy, leaders work to stay in power for their own selfish benefits. In the world's largest democracy, the government is able to hide its monumental failures through propagandas which is based on vilifying its own minorities. Democracy, reading between the lines, is a system which is bound to oppress its minorities.

There is no denying now that the nationalist Hindutva government has pushed India into a viral apocalypse, but the situation here would have been almost the same with any other political party in power; they all are different sides of the same coin, the same rotten system, which feeds on the selfish benefits by sucking the blood of the masses even if they have to spin a thousand hatred and deceptive narratives to attain it.

In the world's largest democracy people are begging on the streets for their fundamental rights to life and healthcare. A system for the people is suffocating its own people to death. We can't breathe!

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