

S a m b h ā ṣ a ṇ

A Free Open Access Peer-Reviewed Interdisciplinary Journal

On the occasion of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's 129th birth anniversary on 14th April 2020, the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities, University of Mumbai has launched a free open access online journal, Sambhāṣaṇ. This interdisciplinary journal hopes to bring diverse disciplines in dialogue with each other through critical reflections on contemporary themes.

Note on a part of the image used on the cover:

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Sambhāṣaṇ or conversation as an art of dialogue has been crucial to the development of both Indian and Western thought. Dialogos in Greek literally means “through word”, where one establishes relationships on the basis of conversations to initiate processes of thinking, listening and speaking with others. Thinkers such as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, David Bohm, Hans Georg Gadamer, Anthony Appiah and Martha Nussbaum have projected shared dialogue as a way of understanding the relationship between the individual and society. While Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Pandita Ramabai, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, Patricia Hill Collins and Judith Butler, to name a few, have started out anew through ruptures in conversations. The inevitability of conversation in academic life emerges from its centrality to human development and ecology. Conversations are not restricted to any single territory, but are enacted between global and the local topographies. This online bi-lingual journal aims at continuing and renewing plural conversations across cultures that have sustained and invigorated academic activities.

In this spirit, Sambhāṣaṇ an interdisciplinary monthly online journal endeavours to:

- be an open platform, where scholars can freely enter into a discussion to speak, be heard and listen. In this spirit, this journal aims at generating open conversations between diverse disciplines in social sciences, humanities and law.
- preserve and cultivate pluralism as a normative ideal. Hence, it attempts to articulate a plurality of points of view for any theme, wherein there is both a need to listen and to speak, while engaging with another’s perspective.
- act as a springboard for briefly expressing points of view on a relevant subject with originality, evidence, argument, experience, imagination and the power of texts. It hopes that these points of view can be shaped towards full-fledged research papers and projects in the future.

Framework

- This journal is open to contributions from established academics, young teachers, research students and writers from diverse institutional and geographical locations.
- Papers can be empirical, analytical or hermeneutic following the scholarly culture of critique and creativity, while adhering to academic norms.
- Commentaries and reviews can also be submitted.
- Submissions will be peer-reviewed anonymously.
- Some of the issues will publish invited papers and reviews, though there will be a call for papers for most issues.
- There would be an occasional thematic focus.

Guidelines for Submission

- Original, scholarly, creative and critical papers with adequate references.
- All references to the author should be removed from the submission to enable the anonymous review process.
- There can be a limit of approximately 3500–4000 words (for papers) and 1500–2000 words (for commentaries) and 1000–1200 words (for reviews).
- Essays should follow the Times New Roman font in size 12 with double space.
- All contributions should follow the author–date referencing system detailed in chapter 15 of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (17th Edition). The style guidelines in this journal can be consulted for quick reference.
- Authors should submit a statement that their contribution is original without any plagiarism. They can also, in addition, submit a plagiarism check certificate.
- The publication of research papers, commentaries and book reviews is subject to timely positive feedback from anonymous referees.

Publisher

***Office of the Dean of Humanities, University of Mumbai,
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Mumbai-400098***

This journal accepts original essays that critically address contemporary issues related to social sciences, humanities and law from an interdisciplinary perspective.

“In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared... In other words there must be social endosmosis.”

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Foreword

Slavoj Žižek

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Covid, Global Warming, Exploitation – The Same Struggle

From today's standpoint, the period of the first Covid panic appears almost in a nostalgic light: true, we were in quarantine, but we expected the quarantine to last for a month or two and then life will return to some kind of normal – even Dr. Fauci told Americans they should look forward to enjoying their Summer vacations. We perceived quarantine as a limited time of exception, almost a welcome standstill in our all too busy lives when we were able to afford some peace with our families, read books and listen to music, enjoy cooking our meals, knowing it will be over soon... Now we are in what some call the “whack-a-mole stage”, clusters are constantly popping up here and there, not to mention countries like the US, Brazil and India, where they are exploding. Only now we are forced to accept that we are entering a new era when we will have to learn to live with the virus. The situation is open, there

is no clear prospect of what direction the epidemics will take – or, as the German virologist Hendrik Streeck succinctly put it: “No second or third wave – we are in a permanent wave.”¹

But we are still all too focused on Covid statistics, many of us regularly checking the numbers of infected, dead and recovered on Worldometer. This fascination by Covid numbers automatically makes us forget the obvious fact that many more persons are dying from cancer, heart attacks, pollution, hunger, armed conflicts, and domestic violence, so that if we get the Covid infection fully under control, the main cause of our troubles will disappear... But human life will remain full of miseries – in some sense, human life IS a misery which ends in a painful way, often with meaningless suffering.

Furthermore, the link between the Covid epidemics and our ecological predicament is getting clearer and clearer. We may get Covid under control, but global warming will demand much more radical measures. Greta Thunberg² was right when she recently pointed out that “the climate and ecological crisis cannot be solved within today’s political and economic systems.” The same global mobilization that we were able to enact apropos Covid crisis is even more needed with global warming and pollution where millions die every year – but we continue not to act in this direction, or, as she put it in a wonderful reversal of the title of the Andersen’s fairy tale: “The emperors are naked. Every single one. It turns out our whole society is just one big nudist party.”

Let’s just mention a case of global warming which should convince even the greatest sceptics: the prolonged heatwave in Siberia which caused wildfires, a huge oil spill and a plague of tree-eating moths: “Russian towns in the Arctic circle have recorded extraordinary temperatures, with Nizhnyaya Pesha hitting 30C on 9 June. Thawing permafrost was at least partly

to blame for a spill of diesel fuel in Siberia this month that led Putin to declare a state of emergency. The supports of the storage tank suddenly sank”.³ Just think about all the long-frozen bacteria and viruses waiting to be reactivated by the thawing of permafrost!

The same goes for the link between Covid and the exploding anti-racist protests. The only true answer to the ongoing debate about “Black lives matter” (why should we not rather say “All lives matter”?, etc.) is a wonderfully-brutal photo-montage that now circulates in the US; it depicts Stalin holding a poster in his hands with the inscription: “No lives matter.” (I leave aside here the polemics about Stalinist murders in Australia which gave birth to this version of the motto) The moment of truth in this provocation is that there are things which matter more than bare life – is this not also the ultimate message of the protests apropos the police violence against Blacks? The Blacks (and others who support them) are not demanding mere survival, they are demanding to be treated with dignity, as free citizens fully equal to whites, and for this they are ready to risk a lot, including (sometimes) their lives. That’s why they gather to protests even if participation in collective protests raises the risk of Covid infection.

Does this mean that Giorgio Agamben was right when he rejected the state-imposed lockdowns and self-isolation as something that implies our reduction to bare life: when we follow these orders, we attest that we are ready to renounce what makes our lives worth living for the chance of bare survival? Do we have to risk our lives (by way of exposing ourselves to possible infection) in order to remain fully human? The problem with this stance is that today the main proponents of abolishing lockdowns are to be found in the populist new Right: its members see in all similar restrictive measures, from lockdowns to obligatory wearing of masks,

the humiliation of our freedom and dignity. To this claim, we should reply by raising the key question: what does abolishing lockdowns and isolation effectively amount to for ordinary workers? It means that, in order to survive, they have to go out into the unsafe world and risk contamination...

This brings us to the key point: the contradictory way the Covid epidemics affected our economy. On the one hand, it forced authorities to do things which sometimes almost point towards Communism: a form of Universal Basic Income, healthcare for all, etc. However, this unexpected opening for Communism is just one side of the coin. Simultaneously, the opposite process is going on with all violence: states saving big companies and big companies amassing wealth. The contours of corona-capitalism are gradually emerging, and with it, new forms of class struggle – or, to quote Joshua Simon⁴:

“US cities have seen the largest rent strike in decades, at least 150 worker strikes and walkouts (most notably by Amazon warehouse workers), and hunger strikes in refugee detention facilities. At the same time, research shows that US billionaires increased their collective wealth by \$282 billion in just twenty-three days during the initial weeks of the coronavirus lockdown. We are forced to recognize the immense inequalities proliferating with the pandemic and lockdown, with people losing their jobs, with gigantic bailouts that overwhelmingly benefit the biggest corporations and the already extremely wealthy, and with the ways those deemed essential workers are forced to keep working.”

The main form of the new exploitation which characterizes work in the conditions of pandemic is “the shifting of costs to workers. From people having no sick leave, to teachers using their broadband and laptops at home to teach, households

are performing all reproductive and productive labour.” In these conditions, it is no longer primarily the capitalist who owns the means of production and hires workers to deal with them: the worker brings with her the means of production. Directly, this happens with the Amazon delivery person or Uber driver bringing to work their own car, filled up with gasoline, with insurance and driver’s license all taken care of.” Simon evokes the poster held by Sarah Mason at an anti-lockdown protest: “Social Distancing equals Communism.” What we get when distancing is abolished is this “freedom” of workers who own their means of production, running around on errands for the company and risking infection. The paradox is here that both main versions of corona-economy, working at home in lockdown and delivering things like food or packages out of lockdown, are similarly appropriated by the capital and imply extra-exploitation.

So our reply to Sarah Mason should be: yes, and that’s why we need social distancing. But what we need even more is a new economic order, which will allow us to avoid the debilitating choice between economic revival and saving lives.

References:

- ¹ <https://www.welt.de/vermishtes/article210530869/Streeck-zu-Corona-Infektionen-Keine-zweite-oder-dritte-Welle-wir-sind-in-einer-Dauerwelle.html>.
- ² <https://www.ecowatch.com/greta-thunberg-2646241937.html?rebellitem=1#rebellitem1>.
- ³ <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/europe/top-stories/climate-crisis-alarm-at-record-breaking-heatwave-in-siberia/ar-BB15Cw41?li=BB12J0nL>.
- ⁴ https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/the-sign-language-of-the-tiny-hands-of-the-market/.

Editorial Note

The suffering unleashed by the pandemic's destructive impact highlights vulnerability – both human and ecological – as an inevitable feature of life. The very notion of destruction is value-laden. Sartre rightly notes that without the perspective of life, the storm does not destroy but only modifies the manner in which mass is distributed (Sartre 39). What is before and after remains stable from the quantitative point of view. However, the notion of destruction enters when one makes reference to a being; a being who tangibly experiences what was there before a storm or a pandemic and compares it with what remains as “no longer” (Sartre 39) there. Such a perspective is not simply one of judgment that provides information or hands out a set of dos and don'ts. Rather, the perspective is a primordial existential one, which indicates possibilities of not continuing to be or being destroyed; thus, inevitably linked to fragility or vulnerability. Yet the very idea

of fragility of being opens the self to others, and likewise others to the self (Butler 2). Such an interdependence of being handed over to others reveals the conflictual aspect of relationships that privilege ownership and the individual. But then relationships are not limited to the struggle for goods or recognition on a Hobbesian note. Alternate notions of relationships hinge on claims made by others, as Sartre and Butler argue, given the inevitability of interdependence; claims which are rooted in imagining a world of being responsible to one another. Such responsibility cannot merely be rooted in rules of following protocols of hygiene or medicine, in turn based on judgments. They require a deep sense of affect, of being able to empathize with the suffering of others, in an attempt to mitigate them. Compassion's Latin root is *pati* or to suffer, while *com* implies being with the sufferer, whereby compassion as *compati* implies suffering with the other. It connotes a common existential condition of lives that simultaneously undergo suffering and empathize with one another to mitigate it.

The pandemic, which we evaluate on an existential note as destructive, makes claims on our being responsible to the vulnerable in compassionate ways. However, it also discloses the vulnerability of one's own self. Moreover, one's own suffering related to such vulnerability also exposes the dependence of the self on the other. Hence, following Neff, self-compassion involves the same empathy to one's own self, as one would have towards the suffering of others (Neff 2012). Like compassion, self-compassion requires an engagement with and a feeling for one's own unique suffering. Moreover, one has to adopt a non-judgmental, existentialist perspective to the failures and limitations of one's own self. Both compassion and self-compassion foreground interdependence through forgiveness, kindness and story-telling.

Compassion is not pity, nor is self-compassion narcissism; they are rather integral to healing therapeutic practices. Gordon Flett (2018) observes that self-compassion and the capacity to soothe oneself

results in the constructive process of dialogue with oneself. Instead of indulging in self-blame, one begins to matter to oneself, which in turn expands to others mattering as well. Thus, self-compassion teaches us to be less harsh on others and ourselves. Harshness towards oneself leads to depression, which can be extended to others as acts of violence. Yet, non-violent and peaceful relations with both self and others do not simply happen spontaneously. Their compassionate and self-compassionate foundations have to be built through intervention, often therapeutic, as Neff has argued. In this process the therapist or counselor has to accept the complex relationship with the patient without being invasive or autocratic. This requires that the therapist adopt a perspective of self-acceptance so that it is transmitted to support and care for patients (Henry, Schacht et al 1990).

The pandemic has opened up innumerable vistas of being responsible and supportive to the vulnerabilities of interdependent lives making both healing and health tangible possibilities, rather than pipe dreams. The essays in this issue, written from the existential condition of global interdependence and vulnerability heightened by the pandemic, reflect as much. They reveal that Butler's "precarious" lives are not simply human, but encompass a whole ecology. The "precarious" and the global are inextricably related as the writings in this issue from different parts of the world reveal. Žižek's (Slovenia) foreword highlights the limits of an individualist perspective that leads to a false dichotomy between lives and livelihoods. One needs to think with and about the ways in which all lives are related to get past such a dichotomy. The reflections on health by Aydin (Turkey), Lal (U.S.A), Kot (Hong Kong) and Sandoval (U.S.A) reveal the centrality of collectivity and compassion in the pursuit of wellness. The narratives by Dang (Thailand), Ramaswami (Singapore), Sax (U.S.A), Sharma (China), Baskina and Tiunova (both from Russia) show how an emphasis on interaction can strengthen learning despite the inevitable distancing measures that prevail. Deepaul (Mauritius) and Pokhrel

and Raghavan (both from Nepal) invoke compassionate and self-compassionate strategies of coping with the changes of the new normal. Clark (South Africa), Kain (Australia) and Sookho (U.K.) reflect on the stark traces of social dichotomies persisting in digital contexts that have become so primary during the pandemic. They identify memory as a difficult and therapeutic partner in moments of isolation. The book reviews by D'Silva and Rathi (both from India) reinforce the theme of interrelatedness and nonviolence. Norris's (U.K.) poem revisits the pandemic twenty years later to reveal that one cannot simplistically claim to have overcome it; the original event of the pandemic has splintered in unexpected directions given our "precarious" and ecological lives.

Our apologies for this late September 2020 journal. The challenge of online academic and administrative prerogatives in these unprecedented times has resulted in a delay. We have also become an English language issue, a process which started since August.

We, the Honorary Editor, Editor and Co-editors remain grateful to Prof. Suhas Pednekar, Vice Chancellor and Prof. Ravindra Kulkarni, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for their encouragement. We thank our authors from different parts of the world for accepting our invitation to contribute to this volume. They have enriched Sambhāṣaṇ with their thought-provoking and inspiring contributions, despite their intense tight schedules and prior commitments. We are obliged to our Advisory Committee members and Board of Consulting Editors for their important suggestions. We put on record our shukriyaan to our Review Editor for inputs and support. We thank our Assistant Editors for their help. Ms. Arunima Kaushik cannot continue with Sambhāṣaṇ due to her new full time job commitment. *Dank* to her for her invaluable assistance during the initial months of this journal. We wish her all the best. Our *dhanyavaad* to Ms. Prajakti Pai, for her time and effort in gifting us an imaginative layout. Dr.

Srivaramangai and Mr. Sanket Sawant are bulwarks of support, as always. Our gratitude to them.

We pay our tribute to Prof. L.K. Deshpande, former Director and Professor at the Department of Economics, University of Mumbai (MSEPP) who passed away in September 2020 for academically enriching the University.

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We dedicate this issue to
practitioners of therapy,
counseling, and medicine
working towards ecologies
of *health and hope* with
compassion and
self-compassion.

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