

## 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.

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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.

## References

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