



# COVID CRONICAL

Thoughts about the road ahead

Public Relations Society of India  
Kolkata Chapter



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*“We cannot re-write the chapters of history already past, but we can learn from them, evolve and adapt.”*

The new normal may even be a better normal, certainly a different normal”

Novel Corona Virus Diseases, shortened as COVID 19 has put us on a time travel to the pandemics that shook the world again and again. The new outbreak has caught us unawares validating what Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel famously said: " We learn from history that we do not learn from history." Therefore has begun intensive research for vaccines and medicines at a frenzied speed the world wide. Till the time they arrive with the right therapeutic efficacy, we have to continue what we have been doing to safe. It is the new SMS (Sanitization, Mask and Social Distancing) doctrine. On the economic fronts, old practices are changing yielding places to new dynamics. It is more than paradigm shifts with unprecedented measures firmly in place to navigate the road ahead. Think tanks across all fields from healthcare to industry, education to entertainment, brand communication to public relations pandemic have told it in no uncertain terms that Coronavirus "has changed, and will continue to change, the world and the way we work, rest and play".So 'going back' to the way we were before COVID-19 is not an option. The challenge, as well as the opportunity, has triggered the process of thinking about a 'new normal'.

**PRSI, Kolkata Chapter brings out this special e-magazine featuring the views of some of its concerned members who have to try to see the light at the end of this harrowing tunnel.**



## Subhash Mohanti

### **Covid's Last Nail in the Coffin; Disappearing Jobs, Vanished Livelihood.**

Like every day, Mr Robin Chakraborty (not his real name) steps out of home in a white shirt, now a bit soiled from repeated use, grey flannels and black boots, walks for over a kilometer to reach the New Garia Bus stand, where a few buses are lined up to leave for their destinations. Some nearby roadside tea shops

and cigarette kiosks are opened encouraged by the lifting of the lockdown.

Mr Chakraborty looks around, his eyes darting from side to side as he gingerly paces up to a corner by a cigarette kiosk. There he stands quietly, his arms stretched in front of him. His eyes now wear a pleading look as he apprehensively stares at the people walking past him. Occasionally, someone stops by to buy a pack of cigarettes. Mr Chakraborty turns his upturned palm at him gesturing him to help him with a few rupees. His overall appearance flummoxes some because he does not look like a regular beggar.

Mr Chakraborty is not a regular beggar. He never was one. Just before the lockdown, he was employed with an innerwear packaging company. A little over fifty, Mr Chakraborty was earning enough to survive. His life had been full of tragedies. A few years back, he lost his wife and a year later his mother passed away. With no children, he was now alone in the house left to him by his late father many years ago.

The lockdown dropped a bomb on his head. His employers decided to terminate his job without even giving him any salary for the last two months during which the factory had been shut down. The employers dismissed his plea saying there was no money to pay salaries as production had halted completely and there were no sales either as clothes were not considered essential during the lockdown period.

Chakraborty's plight is not unique. Dipen Mitra (again not his real name) was a guest house manager prior to the lockdown. He too is on the streets now. Of course, he is not begging at any street corner as yet. Being a decent cook, he is hoping to supply some home cooked food to potential clients. He is requesting people he knows to help him explore this opportunity. This too is hard to come by because every other family in lockdown have learnt to live on meagre means and buying cooked food is last on the purchase list. Mitra is now seriously contemplating selling his two-storey house and may be buying something far away from the city so that he has something in hand to tide over the crisis for now.

Both Chakraborty and Mitra own some assets which can be monetized. But there are many others who live in rented homes and have now been thrown out mercilessly from their jobs. With families to fend, they are faced with the ominous prospect of being asked to vacate because very shortly they will not be able to pay the rents.

There is much talk about the plight of the poor, the migrant workers and the daily wage earner. Not much has transpired other than lofty propositions rendered conspicuous by their absence. The governments may eventually throw them a lifeline because it makes good political sense.

But away from the public glare is the job loss among the country's largest component of the urban population – the middle class. Overwhelming numbers have already been handed the pink slip. To add to their miseries, even salaries accrued during the lockdown are being denied. There is not a whimper of protest. There is none among governments, central or state, who appear sensitive to their utter desperation.

So what will happen of them? How will they even meet their basic needs? Just like always, the middle class will be sacrificed. The pandemic has hit them much harder than perhaps anyone else. Yet, their stories will never be told. The hundreds and thousands of crore of rupees, apparently been earmarked to deal with the corona crisis will pass them by.

The labour classes at the lowest rung have no jobs too, but will find some when the lockdown ends or at least eases to permissible limits. The upper classes do not have any existential worries. The middle class has no such luck. Neither will they be able to regain jobs nor will they be able to re-invent themselves or re-skill themselves to match the new need that might emerge. In any case the lockdowns is teaching businesses to work with less. So a large part of this hapless middle class will not have even a leaf to clutch on to and avoid drowning. Job loss means no salaries. So it also means that much less taxes for the government.

Year after year, the middle class gets cheated. Every national budget is a testimony to this fact. Lower interest from banks diminishes their earnings from the small savings they make over a period of time. Periodic price rise of consumables gnaws away at their bucket list each time. They are pushed from all sides. The pandemic has only worsened it.

This is the last chance for the government to ensure that the middle class does not collapse altogether. India's USP as one of the largest consumer market will disappear into thin air. It is time the government thinks seriously about the mute masses whose dreams crash each year ever so noiselessly. It is time to financially empower them now and keep them afloat for a reasonable period till such time fresh hopes rise over the bleak horizon.



## Chitrlekha Banerjee

### “The Times they are a-Changin”- Life in the time of COVID-19

Every cloud has a silver lining, they say. And I believe it's true. Otherwise, who would have thought that the ozone layer would heal by itself? Who would have thought of seeing the mighty Himalayas from their terrace, some 200 km away? Who would have thought of the Ganges to be so clean that you can actually

drink the water?

It goes without saying; COVID-19 crisis has brought some unprecedented changes in our lives- both personal and professional! New words like lock-down, social distancing, quarantine, isolation, containment zones are now ruling our vocabulary. Corona Virus will go one day, but this period of lockdown will be a lesson for life. Perhaps, certain social norms will be non-existent! Likewise, certain habits pertaining to health and hygiene will remain with us, forever. On the other hand, patience, perseverance and endurance will make us resilient for the rest of our lives. Also, human beings, culture and norms are ever evolving. So even if things change, it will be considered as the way of the world.

‘Work from home’ sounded so cool when we first heard about it only to realise it is not as cool as it sounds! Managing a full time job along with household chores is something most of us have never experienced and the last few months have taught us a lot of things.

Also, working from home has brought us a lot closer to family. We have become so busy in the past years, running the rat-race, we have almost lost track of leading a happy family life. But out of all negativities that COVID-19 has given us, last three months have been a blessing to many of us spending time with family- especially with the elder ones. The sessions of evening ‘adda’ with family members over a cup of tea, or a round of Ludo or carom will be a ‘bliss of solitude’ for years to come!

It is indeed necessary to take care of our mental health too as we were never used to be home for long hours. And thankfully, digital medium is bliss. I am happy, we are lot more connected now, emotionally and digitally. Perhaps, this is the magic of digital media. Let us make use of this time to reach each other virtually, to update our knowledge and share with each other our accomplishments!

However, I wonder what price we are paying to learn these lessons?

Lives?

Keeping hopes high, I only wish the cure of this deadly virus- the PANACEA!



## **Sandeep Sengupta,**

Ethical Hacker & Cyber Security Consultant

### **Working from Home: Guard Against Unsuspecting Perils.**

The Corona virus pandemic has given a new perspective to professional life. While sizeable numbers are set to lose jobs and a grip on their livelihood, the more fortunate ones may

begin a new working life from the confines of their homes.

While not all kinds of jobs will afford this luxury, but several operational areas will get transferred to the home of the workers and transformed in to a whole new paradigm. Internet will become the single most important tool for working from home. Hence it is time to understand what dangers lurk in cyberspace that can derail your work and your life in a manner you may not have fathomed this far.

But this is the reality now and likely in the post-Covid era as well. As one launches in to a new world of professional responsibility, it is important that we understand the “dos and the don’ts” going forward. Remember there is a hacker hanging out there, ready to pounce on one unsuspecting folly of yours!

First and foremost, meetings and webinars have become a way of life. Hence Apps like the Zoom or Cisco Webex, etc are hot properties. Some issues have emerged relating to security issues even misuse. While the popularity and importance of these applications will not permit discarding them, some precautions may be taken to cover unwanted risks. Hence steps may be taken to disable unauthorized entry into the virtual conference rooms, prevent unauthorized participants from carrying out malicious activities on other’s terminals and avoid DOS attacks by restricting users through password and access grant. In adapting oneself to the new norm, it is important to be aware of the security configurations. It is pertinent to follow the advice of the Cyber Coordination Centre, Government of India.

Now let us get to down to some of the do’s and don’ts we must remember while working from home. Some of the key concerns comprise passwords, security modes such as use of anti-virus software, sharing of laptops or desktops with other family members, backup and data encryption. These aspects must be carefully accounted for before one launches in to official work from home.

Selfie mania is another huge issue that attracts hackers. The hackers are

generally not interested in the pictures of the people, but perhaps what is revealed in the background.

CCTVs have become increasingly popular. But even these are potential threats in the hand of hackers. It is important to change passwords regularly as hackers can crack them and view everything that you may be viewing on the CCTVs. Hence poaching of information, data, etc become quite easy in expert hands of the hackers.

While Alexa could be the pride of your home, it may not do all good to your business activity. It is therefore advised that confidential conversations must be avoided in the near vicinity of smart speakers like Amazon's Alexa, Google's Home or Apple's Homepod. In conference halls, care must be taken to mute microphones when one is not speaking but only paying attention to what is being discussed.

It is also recommended that webcams are blocked by default physically as well as the conference applications used for official discussions, seminars, etc. laptops and desktops must always have auto locks enabled.

As the business environment slips seamlessly in to the online mode, it is possible that more intricate security issues will be required to be addressed. But some of the bare minimum steps must be followed for throwing a wall around the activities that will need to be done while working from home.





## **Prof Ujjwal K Chowdhury,**

Pro Vice Chancellor, Adamas University, Kolkata

### **Learning beyond COVID19:**

Many young friends on our campuses, who are quite tech-savvy and are a social media officiendo, often lamented in the past that most others were not and at times even mocked that their teachers are 'dinosaur like' in the world of technology.

COVID19 and protracted lock-down for weeks and possibly months now are creating an equalizer: all need to be up on the digital bandwagon. Youths and not so young, alike.

We are moving to a completely new world of blended learning even post COVID19 as there will be no return to the old normal in most aspects of life. New Normal will impact teaching and learning process in a big way, as in many other areas of life too.

For starters, teacher will be called a mentor now as information and knowledge are at the fingertips of the students faster than that of the teachers, especially the grown-up learners, post 16 years let's say. It was so earlier, but even the facade of higher knowledge (read, degrees, age and experience) is not of great value moving ahead. So mentors shall be needed to inspire, motivate, direct to a new domain of learning or action, bring in perspectives, be an agony aunt/uncle, lend shoulder to a grieving youth, but not much for knowledge and information which are anyways available.

Similarly, student will be a learner. Oh, they were always so. But the onus of learning will all the more be on the learner now on (in the earlier regime teachers teach, students study). Students study for exams, marks and degrees, under the tutelage of teachers, with a structured syllabus. Learners learn within and beyond the classroom, from mentors and others, for lifetime use of knowledge for a career and life, within and beyond the syllabus, structured or unstructured, online or offline.

Next, the digital the add-on, also-ran in education till now, and a bit more important at the university level, will turn to be an equal, or more, partner now - from senior classes in schools to university. It could invade junior school classes as well. Operating through whatsapp group chats, using FB wall and Twitter as message board, Instagram as chronicler of activities through visuals, using Google Class at times, putting self study resources (ppts, pdfs, links, cases, pictures) online in shared google drives, conducting educational delivery through Learning Management Systems online, debates/discussions



online through secure chatbox, using FB Live, or Zoom for audio-visual live interaction, et al, will be the new normal in education.

This means each learner; specially the more privileged ones need to have a smart-phone with secure net connectivity, a laptop and a good Wi-Fi connection. The digital divide will deprive the digital have-nots as is now the case and the rulers have to come with plans of free tablets to the youths and easier inexpensive secure Net connectivity too. A nation already reeling under the economic divide, cannot afford the economically weaker sections to be deprived of digital access, now virtually a human right.

Engagement is the new currency in the post COVID education, as much as in entertainment. For a long time, the grievance in the classroom was that students are not present and neither interested to learn. That challenge is universal. But digital allows the learner to be engaged at his time, place and pace. And that is good enough. A digital learner will seek proactively content that engages him and will react suitably. Hence, the onus will be on the mentors for producing engaging content, making such content across other platforms (like Khan Academy, Course Era, Swayam, etc) available to the learners, and creating opportunities for the learners to be creatively and voluntarily engaged.

It is a qualitatively different world ahead. Good and bad education will not be decided by marks and numbers of degree certificates handed. It will be decided by the level of academic and related online and social media engagement of the learners, the quality of content shared by mentors, and the value and volume of content generated by engaged learners.

Still conferences will happen, but then webinars will be no less. Still classroom sessions will happen, more for clarification and meeting external experts and guests. Still examinations will happen, but a good part will be online, open book tests, applied and contextualized questions. Still syllabus will be there, but it will evolve organically and there will be scope of learning within and beyond the syllabus. Still mentors will be needed, but more to clarify doubts, correct mistakes, lead to content already there digitally available, and at times to motivate in their learners' low moments. This will throw new challenges at education planners as well.

The focus will be projects, assignments, products and designs developed, and marks, grades et al will be the by-products of the process. Journey should and will be more important the destination.

Unique experiences will emerge. A historical location will be learnt through portals, observations of earlier visitors noted online, video links along with a

brief classroom session and a much longer interactive discussion on it within the class and online. A scientific principle will be learnt digitally, visualized online, discussed in content shared ahead of the class, doubts clarified in class, further experimented in the labs, and debated online. Flipped classroom will require mentors to share their content ahead of the session with sessions being an interactive critical appreciation or doubt clearing time. Peer learning will be visible far more than ever in the past even in schools.

### **Exciting Times Ahead.**

Education will truly not be the amount of information that is pushed into the memory cells running a riot there as is usually the case, but true man-making, character-building, life-evolving skills needed to carve out a place under the sun for each learner, socially and economically, contributing to the collective good.

Let us re-invent ourselves. Corona virus has literally asked the world and mankind to reboot and restart the journey of our lives. It will be to our peril and disservice if we do not make Version 2.0 of ourselves, as mentors and learners, which are actually inter-changeable roles lifelong.





## Raghavendra Banerjee

### **Social Aspects of some Prohibitory Measures to Combat Corona Virus**

Some day or other, Corona Virus, which is presently rocking the world as a global menace with a number of death tolls, will be off the scene consequent upon the usual natural course and the concerted relentless efforts of the Government as also of the

people irrespective of caste, creed, and nationality. Even after the nightmare will be over, the after-effects of the precautionary measures like social distancing, which is being repeatedly stressed upon to combat this dreadful phenomenon, will, however, continue to last for a longer time and, in all probability, expose the world before some revitalised social evils, not likely to be wiped out soon.

First of all, the idea of distancing even the nearby neighbours which is advocated with a noble mission may be rooted deep in the mind of the mass. Taking an unwanted ugly turn, it may reappear in the form of untouchability. Years have rolled on; the hangovers of this evil are still noticed at times in some quarters. Now this evil is likely to be back with full potential and strength in the backdrop of the encouragement given to social distancing, though done with a humanitarian aim for the safety and security of the millions. In broad spectrum, this doctrine of maintaining a fair gap of space from others includes the avoidance of the acts of handshakes, hugging, kissing and all that are done as gestures of greeting, heartiness, and intimacy.

Next, the advocacy of distancing others to avoid proximity and physical touch will also leave enormous impact on social assembly or congregation. This may invite rethinking about the holding of congregational religious prayers, both routine and occasional. Chanting of melodious religious verses by several heads namely 'kirtan' with the accompaniment of musical instruments like cymbals, 'mridangam' etc. and roaming around in the neighbourhood may attract negative criticism from many circles as are sensitive over infectious diseases caused by bacteria or virus. The idea behind keeping others at a distance, inter alia, prohibits the holding of conferences, symposiums, fairs, public meetings and the like.

In view of the above, it seems that the prohibitory measure of distancing others, particularly belonging to the self-same society may give rise to new social problems, too tough and complicated to be dispensed with easily.

It is true that considering the urgency of the nation-wide commotion in the face of the dissemination of this dreadful Corona Virus, there is hardly any better alternative than the steps already initiated. Nonetheless, the seeming predicament which is only a short distance away with tremendous social bearing needs to be addressed with all seriousness from sociological points of view to avoid probable complications affecting the bigger community life.