

Dear Readers,

We are into the third wave of the most devastating pandemic of modern era. It seems that we are gradually learning to live with the virus and the disruptions it creates. The science and arts of dealing with the pandemic is being formulated day-by-day and is reaching people. There is hope that the worst might be over and life would eventually crawl back to 'normalcy'. At this juncture, it would be worthwhile to look back, count our losses, mourn, dissect what went wrong, cherish our achievements and also make a pledge to prepare ourselves better for future challenges. In this volume, our experienced and our young authors have brought out some important challenges that our society is facing, particularly the vulnerable sections of the society: poor and marginalized people, people living in conflict areas, urban slums, international migrants, and people suffering from rare diseases. They discuss various tools and approaches that need to be adopted to overcome these challenges.

The effect of the pandemic on the lives of people goes far beyond public health — on livelihood, hunger, education, on mental health — for it is certain that much of the medium and long term consequences are yet to unfold. The approach of the government establishment in dealing with the challenges, many argue, depicted the lack of understanding, insensitivity about the precariousness of the lives of the vast majority of urban poor, the incompetence in dealing with complex multi-dimensional problems, and autocratic and undemocratic tendencies among the political leadership. Yashroop Dey uses the framework of "adverse selection" to argue that in Indian society, political access is manipulated by a small political elite to gain rents, through a system of privileged and personal inter-elite relationships. Poorva Ishani's piece uses the case of Covid-19 vaccines to understand how the dominance of the elites and the rich countries plays out at the global level to produce the wide inequities in access in developing countries, while the rich have grabbed vaccines many times more than what they need. Saifuddin Patel and his co-authors deal with the issue of citizenship to critically reflect on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, to argue that this Act has been brought out by undermining popular opinion and global opposition, and could be seen as an attack on the secular fabric of the Indian Constitution.

Any policy decision or effort to bring about changes in the lives of poor and vulnerable people should start with creating the systems, institutions and processes that provide spaces for people to participate in decisions related to their lives. RFI Smith emphasizes on the need to improve the capabilities of various levels of government so that the voices of the marginalized communities are heard and that the officialdom is able to relate to the issues, problems and challenges that they face; accomplish complex and sensitive tasks and deliver the services people need. He emphasizes the need for political leadership in creating 'virtuous cycles' in which improvements in one component drive improvements in others.

Namesh Killemsetty proposes to apply various Problem Structuring Methods (PSMs) which provides a holistic framework to identify the problems faced by poor and vulnerable populations from their perspectives in urban slums and would aid in more sensitive solutions to their problems and challenges. Naresh Singh emphasises on the need to extend the Legal Empowerment of the Poor (LEP) framework to ensure the human rights of the poor and vulnerable, particularly those living in Fragile and Conflict Affected Areas (FCAS). Swati Yadav brings to the forefront the issue of developing a social security network for the urban poor which has the capacity to function as an automatic stabiliser during crises and emphasises on the need to augment public spending to ensure social security and create a sustainable environment.

In the current Indian context, where centralization of policy decision making is leading to policy paralysis on the one hand and reduced motivation and capabilities among various levels of government on the other, Smith, Singh, Yadav, and Killemsetty's insights have considerable significance and provide pathways for a more inclusive, democratic and developed society.

We are glad to inform you that we are able to bring out the journal within the regular interval for the fourth time consecutively in these trying times of the pandemic. This would not have been possible without the numerous contributions of our colleagues. We are particularly indebted to

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Enjoy reading and stay safe!

Thanks and warm regards.

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