



## Editorial

We are amidst a deep and unprecedented crisis posing questions on our basic existence. We are not only looking at Covid 19 and a vaccine that is still to be found, but also at a series of such potential outbreaks, adding layers of masks with more limited socializing.(Kumaramkandath, 2020, p. v)

These are the observations of our esteemed colleague in the *Artha* Editorial published on April 1, 2020. Since then, the world and India's first vaccines have been produced in record-breaking time (Bharat Biotech, 2019; Pfizer, 2021; Serum Institute of India, 2021). The frontiers of science—broadly speaking, the education of humankind—has made this achievement possible.

However, the grim reality continues to date, if not, worsened. The loss of people's lives, homes, jobs, and education are untold, caused by a virus whose diameter is approximately 60–140 nm (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2021). As of August 5, 2021, Johns Hopkins University of Medicine (2021) reports 200,470,562 cases [emphasis added] of COVID-19 and 4,261,315 deaths across the globe; the all-time numbers for India stand at 31,812,114 and deaths at 426,290. These "cases" are valued human beings: sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, husbands or wives, fathers or mothers, grandparents, relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, classmates, and citizens. The Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights (OHCHR, 2021) states that about one lakh Indians would be rendered homeless during the monsoon season due to evictions, which includes 20,000 children, most of whom are from marginalised communities. "At least 32 lakh salaried Indians lost jobs in July alone amid the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, although the overall unemployment rate has fallen by more than 2 percentage points month-on-month" (Deccan Herald, 2021).

It must be noted that India's Ministry of Education announced the National Educational Policy on July 27, 2020 (Ministry of

Education, 2020). Some of its special features include: ensuring universal access at all levels of schooling from pre-primary school to grade 12, ensuring quality early childhood care and education for all children between 3-6 years; setting up of PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), equitable and inclusive education—Special emphasis given on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), separate Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups; ensuring availability of resources through school complexes and clusters, expansion of open and distance learning to increase GER [Gross Enrolment Ratio], internationalization of education, achieving 100% youth and adult literacy, and strengthening of the Central Advisory Board of Education to ensure coordination to bring overall focus on quality education.

Banerji (2021, February 1) in the ASER Centre's *Annual Status of Education Report*, expresses the following thoughts about the learning of children during the pandemic:

As children return to school, enabling them to acquire foundational literacy and numeracy skills must have high priority. ASER 2020 Wave 1 data indicates that there are other resources - human (family members, communities) and technology (hybrid mechanisms and mixed modes of delivery) that can strongly support school-based efforts to fuel 'catch up'. The available evidence strongly presents the possibility of 'building back better'. Now concerted action must follow. (p. 14)

A recent study by Singh et al. (2021) examined the Indian government's initiatives of online learning during COVID-19 at higher education institutions and student and faculty responses to these initiatives. The findings indicate that several states used the initiatives such as Diksha, Swayam Prabha Channel, Shiksha Van, E-Pathshala, and the National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER). Faculty and students have accepted the online arrangement for a gap-free education, stating their preference for returning to face-to-face interactions. Notable challenges were internet connectivity, electric power, large classes, and health. Similar studies and findings can be seen across disciplines.

For about a year, the number of web and organisational resources and courses that are available for educators in PK-12 and higher education, to equip themselves to teach online have increased manifold. Teaching must result in learning. Hopefully, the best evidence-based teaching and assessment practices will result in better student learning. But education and whole education are beyond academics. God Forbid, if the pandemic continues, we must devise ways to build whole lives via our educational systems—to have “less-is-more” academic schedules, meaningful tasks, deliberately created times for physical activity and emotional nurturance—away from the electronic devices.

Psychologically speaking, this pandemic in its first year left people across the world scrambling to adapt and cope in any way possible. During this difficult period, the uncertainties related to physical health were amplified in the echo chambers of social media and new media (Pimenta et al., 2020), the severe negative impact of COVID 19 (coronavirus) on health, home life, financial stability, and work/organisational infrastructure generated significant psychological distress across the globe (Pfefferbaum & North 2020; Xiong et al., 2020).

A systematic review has linked increases in stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms and social isolation in adults with a corresponding increase in sedentariness and lower physical activity (Violant-Holz et al., 2020). Adolescents and children have also been equally vulnerable to disruption in the affective and attention domains (Panda et al., 2021). The importance of psychological flexibility in understanding and predicting how individuals react to short- and long-term challenges posed by the pandemic has been highlighted (Dawson & Golijani-Moghaddam, 2020). These studies also suggest that the psychological impact of the pandemic may be more severe for vulnerable individuals facing mental health challenges (Pinkham et al., 2020).

It is also of interest to note that Haas et al. (2021) have suggested a role for cultural factors in mediating the influence of nature on psychological health during the pandemic. Some researchers have looked to cultural or indigenous ways to enhance self-regulation as a protective measure (Zhu et al., 2021). In one of the older issues of our journal, the value of *Mouna Vrata* (vow of silence) as a

technique in self-regulation has been discussed (Roshni & Benedict, 2016). In light of this, we can say that a lot more work remains to be done particularly to identify and curate culturally relevant interventions for coping with the effects of global disasters like this pandemic. Researchers are still trying to make sense of the cumulative impact on normal healthy individuals and as the research publications grow, many more insights are emerging across peoples and cultures. This issue of *Artha* also compiles contributions with a psychology perspective, from the Indian panorama.

### **About this issue of *Artha***

Prakat Karki presents the impact of COVID-19 on education in India, in his article, *"The year lost to the pandemic: Reviewing the impact of COVID-19 on Education in India."* With support from statistical data, Karki highlights the digital divide that exists geographically in the nation for accessing education, along with the main challenges that students, teachers and educational institutions face. The pandemic and the lockdown resulted in the disruption of the mid-day meal programme, which in turn increased the number of dropouts and decreased rates of school enrolment. The author describes the impact of the pandemic on examinations both at the school level and in higher education, and further on for employment. He also shows that school instruction is much more than merely academics; he portrays how social distancing can affect students. Karki concludes his review by stating what must be done to improve the existing educational scenario.

In *"Interrogating COVID-19 from a gender lens: The pandemic as a silent killer of educational aspirations and achievements of girls,"* R. Indira explains how the pandemic and lockdown-related school closures could reverse the limited, but important progress that gender equality and women's rights have made thus far. She identifies the challenges that the non-enrolment of girl children in primary schools can pose. The author delineates the educational attainment of girls as a consequence of the shift from physical classes to virtual classes. She discusses that women and girls experience economic, health, and social risks disproportionately as compared to men and boys. The writer points out that the reported

cases of gender violence in the country have increased during the lockdown. Finally, Indira provides a roadmap for the future of girls and women for living and learning.

In *“When silent actors talk: Bodies as learning infrastructure in the post-pandemic world,”* Arur et al. describe the lived experiences of high school students with a socio-material approach. The authors discuss the interaction of human and non-human actors in learning infrastructure and use the pandemic-initiated breakdown to grasp the hidden relationships in this infrastructure. This article highlights implications for policy and other changes that have become significant in both online and offline contexts.

Rajvi Trivedi reviews Fernando Reimers’s 2020 book, *Educating students to improve the world*. Reimers is the Ford Foundation Professor of practice in international education at Harvard Graduate School of Education. In, *“Developing Globally Competent Students,”* Trivedi writes that the book presents the several daunting challenges the world is facing and highlights the need to make "educational systems around the globe more relevant to develop citizens who are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to deal with the challenges of the 21st century" (p. 91). The author unravels that though there has been an intention to impart global education, educational institutions have not developed global competence among students.

Shravani Bhattacharyya in her article titled *“Exploring human connections with living spaces during the Covid-19 pandemic,”* explores how work from home experiences have altered the perception of the personal living spaces. As the year 2020 drew to a close most people had settled into a new restricted routine of what was characterized as the “new normal.” This pandemic has shattered the boundaries between personal and work lives for most people, forced individuals into multitasking and split their focus and attention across competing demands that are no longer geographically separated. This article highlights and discusses the key themes in the human-environment connection, that have emerged from the scenario of work from home, and shares psychological insights for the field of design and planning.

In “*The impact of the pandemic on children with autism in Bangalore,*” Vanitha Rao, who provides psychological services for autism, writes about the field view of the impact. There has been a notable drop in many mental health support services, medical help has been less accessible to the vulnerable and needy and providers are adapting to online modes of delivery. The author, who provides psychological services for autism, has explored what this pandemic period has meant for the children who had been diagnosed before the pandemic, and those who developed difficulties and were diagnosed during the pandemic, and finally the challenges for the parents as well.

This pandemic experience has exposed large gaps in the Indian ecosystem for mental well-being and mental health services and we hope this issue of *Artha* highlights some key issues and helps us to recognize that improvement in these areas is now imperative.

We thank our authors and reviewers for contributing to this issue. We hope that these articles will stimulate our readers to reflect and to be changemakers in their spheres of influence.

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