



JAIN
DEEMED-TO-BE UNIVERSITY

CENTRE FOR
RESEARCH IN
SOCIAL SCIENCES
AND EDUCATION



THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

NEWSLETTER FROM THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH
IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2024

PLENARY SESSION 1

Envisioning India in the Post-pandemic World



Dr. Priyanca Mathur

Head and Associate Professor, CeRSSE
JAIN (Deemed-to-be University)

The first Plenary Session of the International Conference was chaired by **Professor M. J. Vinod**, *Department of International Studies, Political Science and History, Christ (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru*. He began by discussing the huge impact that COVID has made in everyone's lives and how it has put forward notable lessons for the world, drawing parallels with historical events like the Spanish flu. Stating that every event in the global arena highlights the necessity of the dual process of learning and unlearning, he reflected on the memory of the 30 Years' War in the first half of the 17th century, where 8 million lives were lost due to human conflict whose devastating consequences were well known. Events like these (including COVID) raised questions about the role and stand of geopolitics, especially in relation to China, in the context of the pandemic and its role in creating the entire COVID discourse. The overarching perspective is that COVID-19 has prompted deep reflection, emphasising the need to learn from historical errors made in order to reform and bring about better alternatives. He added that the pre- COVID normalcy is not necessarily the best option that we should be carrying forward so as to tackle and mitigate the current situations, developments, challenges and crises.

The prominent changes post-pandemic has made the world realise of loopholes, which were otherwise unseen. These discourses are full of positives and negatives, thus it lies with the individuals, schools of thoughts and states as to what part of them are segregated and assimilated with the present scenarios and discover ways to learn from them. The issues are of such a kind that they are always evolving, making some changes in the world order. Thereby the way of engagement with these changes also must change. He analysed that what had happened post-pandemic was to happen as the process for that had started before the outbreak - COVID merely acted as an interlude between this transition. Instead this process of transition started from the time of the demise of the Soviet Union, and this discourse hence included many events that brought about dynamic turns to the trajectory.



Prof. M.J. Vinod Chairing Plenary Session 1

The first speaker, **Prof. Arvind Kumar**, *Professor of United States Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*, spoke extensively on 'Emerging India's Role in the Post-Pandemic World Order' highlighting how in India, there appears to be a notable effort for the first time to grasp the potential contours of the post-pandemic world order. His thought-provoking analysis highlighted India's role in the post-pandemic world order, explored the economic, political, and social dimensions, shedding light on how India can emerge as a key player in shaping the future trajectory of global affairs. Kumar's insights sparked discussions on India's potential to contribute significantly to global resilience and recovery. With regard to the critical global issue of climate change, India has stressed on less dependency on the use of fossil fuel.

According to Prof. Kumar, most developed countries like the United States have not been able to demonstrate their will in terms of addressing many of these global problems, which India has done. This seems to be changing the larger discourse on the geopolitical dimension which the world is going through, because the world scenario is still highly uncertain with the ongoing challenges from Israel-Hamas's conflict, and another ongoing conflict for more than almost 2 years in February – the Russia - Ukraine conflict. Besides, India has moved ahead in demonstrating its autonomy in the foreign policy making, showing how India would play a pivotal role in shaping the world order. He also highlighted the subtle distinction between the terms 'global order' and 'world order,' noting that the line between these concepts are thin, emphasising that the idea of a bipolar world order was perceived as more straightforward, contrasting with the present multipolar system. In this current multipolar landscape, nations with geopolitical visions are vying for influence, creating a more complex scenario. India, however, stands out by not pursuing a zero-sum game approach, aiming to create a relevant situation that benefits all.

In areas like climate change, finance, and justice, India has demonstrated its commitment to finding solutions that benefit the global community. The recent controversy at COP (Conference of the Parties) surrounding India's stance on fossil fuels diverted attention from India's original contributions to the debates. Despite this, India's willingness to address global concerns without undermining the interests of others has been evident. Additionally, the speaker highlighted India's historical foreign policy orientation, which diverged from the capitalist-communist binary.

The next speaker of plenary session 1, **Prof. Manish, Chairperson and Dean, School of International Studies, Central University of Gujarat** presented an overview of the course of the presentation, highlighting how the World Order used to look like during the pandemic and the time afterwards. He stated that COVID cannot be called the 'Wuhan Virus,' but there lies some connection with the place as to where the Virus is known to be generated, though the source of it lies unknown till date. He also mentions that, despite efforts to get a report about it was expected from China, but the political scenario there did not let the sources be revealed. Secondly, it is important to reflect back as to when did the WHO declared COVID to be a pandemic. It was after one and half months that the virus had already spread to Milan, reasons being the intimate connections between Wuhan and Milan due to the prominent textile industry of the latter.

Some of the core debates revolved around if the pandemic is a part of the Globalisation, deglobalisation, the economic impacts and China's role on this, which has remained suspicious all this time. The economic contest between China and the USA is constant and will remain in future in vivid forms, if not militarily. When we move towards understanding the rise of China, it is mainly economic development and brings in challenges that are not linear in nature. China's economy faced a setback, but it was able to emerge out of a financial crisis. The post covid world order reflects how states are still facing the pandemic hangover in the form of low growth, stubborn inflation and rising interest rates. This is more likely to bring about challenges for the SDG goals. Global trade, according to him, will remain under pressure due to various reasons like geopolitical tensions, Russia-Ukraine War and the crisis in the Middle East. Another constant challenge is the weakening of the Global demand, such as in the case of Sri Lanka. This gets worsened due to the tightening Monetary and Fiscal Policies which will keep the global inflation at 5 percent in 2023-24. He focussed on scenarios in Asia, where China plays a major role is likely to shape the Asian economy which will ultimately have a print on the global economy. He commented that Japan and India are global players, but with challenges and the first one being the ageing population. He presented the statistics that show by 2025, one in four people will be over the age of 60. Whereas in case of India, 66 percent of the population will be under 35 years of age, which the speaker highlights as a strong point for India to work upon and in fact has made efforts to uplift and empower its youth in due course of time.

He then puts forward the importance of the G20 Conference which led to the coming up of a Consensus Document, which is a major achievement, despite the ongoing turmoil in and around countries. India made a huge move by bringing in African countries in the G20 Conference, despite the fact that this is an area where China and India are going to contest. In gradual times, the Global South has somewhat understood the hypocrisy of the Western world and the external minister made it clear in G20 that it is high time that Europe gets out of the mindset where it thinks that their problems are the 'world problems' but world problems are not Europe's problems, be it environmental security, food security and many more. Hence, India is a major contender in the Global south and looking at this, China equally has an eye on this realm. China provided the BRI, but it is also looking for an alternative world order. While India tries to be the interconnecting bond between the Global south and the North, China on the other hand wants to make

its own multilateral institutions which are non-western, which will as a result keep the contestation between India and China, the talk of the town for a long while and probably will never diminish.

The next speaker, **Prof. Sreeradha Datta**, *Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana* brought to the attention the democratic deficit in South Asia, addressing the challenges faced by the region. Her incisive examination of the state of democracy sparked conversations about the importance of fostering democratic values and institutions in the face of evolving political landscapes. She particularly focussed on the countries of South Asia, largely India, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and even Nepal, Bhutan. Her major argument rested on the robust civil society that every country in South Asia without which political leaders would have used power to consolidate their positions far more strongly. Another major argument made by her is that it's not only individuals who look up for democracy, states have also changed their positions, namely India. She concluded by highlighting that the year 2024 is going to be a year of election in South Asia – beginning with January in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka.

Dr. Pratip Chattopadhyaya, *Associate Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, University of Kalyani*, was the last speaker for the session who spoke on G-20 Delhi Declaration and India's Moment in the Post-pandemic World. He highlighted the basic difference that is found between the period of globalisation and the period of post-pandemic world order is the fact that during globalization, we were talking about interdependence, connectivity at a world scale between countries. But in the pandemic period, it has taught us that collaborations, connectivity, network building must also be within the country, within the nation itself, touching across the margins. Hailing from a theoretical background of national role conceptions that K.J. Holstey talked about in the 1970s, the speaker looked at what India wanted, how India wants to create its own identity, what image or construction India wanted to have. When India started its foreign policy way back in 1947, there were two moments: moment of non- alignment, moment of opening up of the economy in 1991. But both these fundamental foreign policy shifts actually took place on the basis of domestic requirements. When the policy of Non-alignment was pursued, it focussed on building the domestic economy, so that entanglement with the global power game would be avoided. In 1991, the Indian economy had to be liberalised due to the balance of payment crisis. In

both of these instances, they have the domestic pulls that have influenced our Foreign policy shift. But the pandemic is external which enhances India to build its domestic economy and infrastructure.

The Plenary Session 1 was followed by an engaging question and answer session that covered the importance of China for India's growth and development, sustainability and survival, civil society and democracy, etc.



Faculty members of CeRSSE with the speakers of Plenary 1