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### **Experiential Account - British International Studies Association (BISA) 2022 Conference- Learnings and Take-aways**



Dr. Debangana Chatterjee

Assistant Professor, Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CeRSSE)

There was a striking difference in how I experienced this year's British International Studies Association (BISA) conference compared to the previous occasion. It has been the advent of multiple firsts for me- my first international conference as an academic professional and my first physical international conference in the post-pandemic world. This year's conference -BISA 2022- which was held at Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, from June 15 to 17, remained true to its purpose on all counts. The collective of scholars from across the globe reflected the organisational ethos of BISA which is renowned for providing an inclusive, diverse and friendly platform for the community of academics to discuss, promote and develop international studies.

This was my second BISA conference, having attended BISA 2018 while pursuing my Ph.D at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. On that occasion, there was a sense of awe at being part of such a prestigious gathering, while at the same time, as a student, the experience was

inspiring and a little intimidating. This year, representing JAIN University's Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CeRSSE) as an Assistant Professor, I had the additional responsibility of presenting not just my work or the voice of not just my research unit, but also that of the many scholars from the Global South who face challenges that could be ironed out to a large extent with the kind of support and collaboration opportunities a platform like BISA provides. Back in 2018, despite having experience in research, I was yet to experience the challenges a social sciences or international relations researcher faces while out on the field after shedding the cocoon student life provides.

This year's BISA was a landmark platform in itself on many counts. It was the first physical conference staged in the post-Covid-19 era, and true to the need of the hour, it attempted to address means to cooperate effectively to deal with global challenges posed by the pandemic. The conference looked at major shifts in global politics taking place out of sight, while some scholars attempted to shed light on how the digitisation of international politics creates new forms of hybrid activism and change, or even exaggerates existing divides and inequalities.

True to its aims, BISA provided me with a platform to present my paper and get critical and creative inputs on how to add new dimensions to its research to make it a complete piece of academic work. That apart, I, along with other scholars from Asia and Africa, was given the opportunity to address the larger gathering, including accomplished and acclaimed academics from Europe and the USA, and present the challenges we face while pursuing research in the Global South. In a workshop, titled *Gender, Race and the Intersections of Precarity* organised by BISA in association with the Political Science Association (PSA) within the conference, I was given the platform to speak on behalf of the underrepresented Global South Scholars at the conference. From institutional shortcomings to fund crunches to sheer lack of infrastructure for field initiatives- a myriad of issues were presented. The idea was not to present a bleak picture but to present reality, which, through collaboration, can be overcome, thereby facilitating novel and pertinent research work - ones capable of touching lives and making a difference - to take place in all corners of the world. At the end of the workshop, the *International Affairs* blog offered me their platform to write on the theme of *Inclusive IR*.

My paper, titled: *The Masking Performative in the Post-Pandemic World: Meanings, Evolution and Knowledge Production*, was presented as part of the first session on the opening day of the conference. In the paper, I was able to look at the current two-pronged perceptions on masking -- post-pandemic medical masking based on science and the traditional cultural and religious forms of masking -- through lenses provided by the theoretical conclusions from studies in the past six decades or so. Based on both theories as well as observations from the happenings around the world at present where the acceptability of masking as a pandemic norm has not paved the way for the acceptance of other face covers, I was able to conclude that the parameters for adjudging the different forms are located at drastically different planes. And that is a result of the lingering colonial past and hence, belief systems are yet to be decolonised. I could successfully present the need to reinstate the idea of the timelessness of post-coloniality.

The feedback on the paper was positive with creative inputs ensuring the scope of my work gets further enhanced. That, for me, is the real gain of attending conferences such as BISA. The enriching academic experience and the inspiration one gets rubbing shoulders with some of the best in the world are priceless. And, the humility and the camaraderie by which the senior academics address us juniors -- guide us, help us or simply extend support -- reiterates the universal philosophy on which academia should be based: knowledge assimilation, sharing, collaboration and universal growth.