

Call for Papers: COVID-19 impacts and responses in Sri Lanka

The Social Scientists' Association invites submissions of between 2000 and 5000 words on the general theme of COVID-19 impacts and responses in Sri Lanka for the forthcoming issue of *Polity*, its biannual English-language online and print journal.

As COVID-19 took hold in Sri Lanka, as elsewhere, a refrain that made the rounds is that 'we are all in the same boat'; and hence that all of us should partake and share in the pain and sacrifice of the lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. This absurdity masks the complex ways in which pre-existing fractures and inequalities in society have been exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19; while new ones are spawned.

Whereas the overwhelming focus in response to the pandemic has understandably centred on public health concerns; simplistic but no less misleading narratives of how the virus does not discriminate between humans have attempted to paper over the differentiated social, economic, political, and affective impacts of the lockdown have swiftly circulated. While we have all been buffeted in the uncertain and stormy sea of COVID-19, we were never in the same boat, and neither were all boats as sturdy and well-stocked as others.

Evidence of this may be seen in a diversity of symptoms and conditions. From the unwavering insistence on repatriation of middle-class students rather than working class migrants; to the requirement for proof of employment for permission to travel to work during curfew even though the vast majority of workers are in the informal economy. From the digital divides of school and university students, and the pressures on teachers to adapt overnight to online and home-based learning. From the politics of eligibility and distribution of the measly Rs. 5000 cash transfer to vulnerable groups. From the democratic crisis stemming from rule

by the Executive in the absence of Parliamentary checks and balances, and heightened militarisation of the state. From increased reports of domestic violence and untold abuses within the home during the lockdown.

From more than 50,000 arrests of curfew breakers to the permissiveness with which tens of thousands publicly mourned the sudden death of a government politician. From the furore over online delivery websites making a quick buck, while others with neither smart phones nor cash relied on self-organised distribution by social organisations and solidarity-minded individuals. And these are but a few examples that illuminate how differently COVID-19 has been felt among various sections of our society. For those who wish to see, COVID-19 shone a spotlight on the structural inequalities that are deeply embedded in society.

COVID-19 has also made us more keenly aware that the received wisdom on the benefits of free markets, globalisation, strong government, smart technology, etc. have only intensified rather than undermined the structures that reproduce deep-seated inequalities within and between societies across the world. While rumours of the death of the many varieties of neoliberalism are likely unfounded, this moment has carved a space to re-imagine our social, political and economic order. This space is not secured, and neither is it free from occupation by reactionary ideologies and forces.

Suggested sub-themes include, but are not restricted, to the following:

- *Political, economic, social, affective crises, and their gendered (non-)resolution;*
- *The welfare State and the state of Welfarism;*
- *Case-studies on differentiated impacts on particular communities or groups including of women in unpaid and paid care work; internal and*

transnational migrants; precarious and informal economy workers; LGBTQI persons, etc.

- *Education and higher education under lockdown;*
- *Economies of life and death;*
- *Political mobilisation and resistance: opportunities, constraints, prospects.*

Recognising also the ways in which COVID-19 has made traditional methodologies of research and data collection more difficult or even redundant, this issue of *Polity* welcomes creative re-visioning of the dominant modes of research communication. Previous issues, in addition to conventional research and analytical articles, have published interviews, field diary notes, and extended book and film reviews, through which to share ideas and information. In this issue and beyond, we wish to continue such exploration. Prospective contributors are invited to contact the editors with their

ideas on novel mediums of expression on the general theme of this issue.

Expressions of interest of no more than 500 words, of potential submissions on COVID-19 impacts and responses in Sri Lanka – as well as on unrelated topics on the social sciences and contemporary politics – are invited by August 21st 2020. First drafts of commissioned essays, commentaries, works-in-progress, reviews and any other mode of reflection, are anticipated by September 30th, 2020.

For further information please contact the Editors at polity@ssalanka.org.

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