Changing Dimension of Human Security in the Pandemic Era

Aparna Roy*

Abstract: *The entire world is a well-knit mosaic of humanity, assimilating and accommodating the socio-cultural, politico-economic, ethnic diversities. However, over the years the humanity is facing newer challenges in various forms. The present challenge is -Covid-19. The threat reflects how a virus can create havoc in the lives of people living across the globe. Therefore, the question of 'security' becomes pertinent in our theorizing and practice. The concept of 'security' in its traditional sense means the territorial non-interference by external forces (that is, military interference in the sovereignty of the state). But with passing days (especially in the wake of liberalization- privatization- globalization) the very state-centric idea of security has given way to wider humanistic notion of securities that include not only the traditional aspect but also the requirements of food, health and hygiene, sustainable environment, personal and community well-being and political support for ensuring greater transparency. The present paper tries to bring out how the pandemic has threatened and is continuously threatening the livelihood of the people and how it has changed the contours of power sharing and decision-making, control over resources and is reshaping the public/private divide irrespective of race, gender, class, culture, region, and so on. Here the entire gamut of humanity is the real sufferer. The impact of the pandemic has altered the relationship among the stake holders and is likely to continue for a long time in the future.*

Keywords: *Securities, Sustainable, Pandemic, Threatened, Livelihood.*

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Pritilata Waddedar Mahavidyalaya, Panikhali, Nadia.
  e-mail: aprnaroy82@gmail.com

The present essay begins with a painful transition in the midst of Covid-19 (spread of *corona virus* across the globe) that has threatened the livelihood of millions and millions of people. The entire world has come to a standstill due to the adverse impact of the pandemic. Since time immemorial, 'security' considerations in various form has always paved the human civilization and presently in the second decade of the 21st century the virus is reshaping the contours of the so-called 'security' in its own way. Continents-regions-countries be it rich-poor, developed-developing-underdeveloped are the real sufferers. Truly speaking, humans are in the midst of a larger challenge. Already due to the LPG (liberalization, privatization, globalization) the world economy has vastly diminished the traditional means of livelihood for the poor. Along with this the dominance and control of rich nations, multinational corporations and international capital over markets, resources and labour in the developing countries through various modes (like aid, trade, technology) has largely weakened the capacity of nation-states and governments to promote human development and offer protection to the poor people. Not only this, another aspect of security requires an understanding of security across time and space. What we generally interpret by security is a western connotation but practitioners believe that there is another way also to look into the matter. Therefore the other version of the East is equally significant- that lays emphasis on need-oriented human security approach.[1] For better analysis, the entire essay is undertaken to explain the notion of security and its changing meaning over the years; connection of the pandemic with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its impact relating to inequalities in power and decision-making, control over resources and the domestic scenario within a household and outside.

I

Given the current scenario the pandemic is likely to stay for a long period of time and even if humans overcome the same it's unlikely that the impact/ footprints of the pandemic will disappear in the post-pandemic era. Therefore, the issue of 'security' and the understanding of its different forms are relevant. The present challenge is the threat of Covid-19. The threat itself centers round the larger issue of 'security'. Let us first take a glimpse of what actually the notion of 'security' mean and its evolutionary status. The concept of security has been the buzzword of International Politics and International Relations. Traditional idea of security mainly focused on the issue of state-centric territorial non-interference by a state against a state in the inter-state system. However, over the years, the traditional meaning has been broadened to include human security taking into its fold human development, women's security, environmental security and so on. To quote Mahbub ul Haq, "…the world is entering a new era in which the very concept of security will change – and change dramatically. Security will be interpreted as: security of people, not just territory. Security of individuals, not just nations. Security through

development, not through arms. Security of all the people everywhere – in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities, in their environment."[2] Subsequently, not territorial state but the humans became the focus of discussion.

The origin of the concept of human security dates back to the Human Development Report of 1994 [issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)]. In the words of Amitav Acharya, "… its roots can be found in debates about the meaning of security that predate the end of the cold war, including the debate over the disarmament-development nexus that took place in various United Nations forums in response to the cold war arms race"[3]. According to the UNDP Report, human security includes the following components :- a) economic security (assurance of basic income from productive and remunerative work for individuals), b) food security (ascertain that all people always have physical and economic access to basic food), c) health security- (guarantee of minimum protection from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles), d) environmental security (protection of people from the short and long –term devastation by nature both man-made and natural environment), e) personal security (protection of people from physical violence from the state/ external states/ violent individuals in the form of domestic abuse), f) community security (protection of people from the loss of traditional relationships and values against sectarian and ethnic violence), g) political security (protection of people's basic human rights and freedom of individuals and groups from governmental control).[4] Now, it is quite clear that security, especially human security "is not a concern with weapons .It is a concern with human dignity. In the last analysis, it is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed."[5] Therefore, the non-conventional meaning of security emerges from the roots of crisis, threats, revolutions, etc., for example the 1973 oil crisis (the Arab oil embargo in response to the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War), the 9/11 attacks, the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the 2002 Bali Bombings, the 2003 SARS outbreak and the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, outbreak of bird flu and swine flu, and the present Covid-19. All the stated examples point out to the issue of redefining the concept of security. Security concerns are not limited to the UNDP report of 1994 but several independent commissions, such as the Brandt Commission (1977), the Brundtland Commission (1983) the Commission on Global Governance (1992)[6] equally played a significant role in enlarging the focus of security from state-centric security to people-centric security. In addition to this the Sustainable Development Goals (17) set up in 2015 by the UN General Assembly to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (2000)[7], to be achieved by 2030, also enlarged the scope of territorial security considerations. The Sustainable Development Goals included the following : i) no poverty, ii) zero hunger, iii) good health and well-being, iv) quality education, v) gender equality, vi) clean water and sanitation, vii) affordable and clean energy, viii) decent work and economic growth, ix) industry, innovation and infrastructure, x) reduced inequality, xi)

sustainable cities and communities, xii) responsible consumption and production, xiii) climate action, xiv) life below water, xv) life on land, xvi) peace and justice strong institutions and, xvii) Partnerships for the goals.[8] All this repeatedly points to the consideration of non-conventional *humane* aspect of security.

II

The UNDP report of 1994 and the SDGs of 2015 bring us to another threshold where we need to realize that security consideration is never static but dynamic. It changes its course with time and need. Interestingly, the spread of the virus all of a sudden forced the governments around the world to uniformly follow measures to slow down the transmission of the same. Steps like intermittent lockdowns or curfews, border closure, domestic travel restrictions, closure of educational institutions, limits on public gathering and so on were taken. These initiatives initially checked the spread but gradually its impact was felt to be countervailing in the long run. The global village and its physical presence became non- existent. The health crisis turned out with such a magnitude that it crippled the socio-economic base of the society. It affected women and men, LGBT (lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender) people, children, youth and older persons, refugees and migrants, the poor and the rich, people with disabilities, persons in detention and minorities. Negativity surrounded the entire world. People lost jobs and livelihoods, standards of living fell, communities and families came to be marginalized further.

If we go by the parameters of human security one by one it becomes clear that the pandemic has actually transmitted 'insecurities' among the people. The existing global economic meltdown coincided with the pandemic to worsen it further. International trade be it export-import of raw materials or finished goods, manufacturing or assemblage has been hard hit. Industries heavy or medium to small, agriculture and production houses of various kinds, ancillary units, hospitality industry (especially hotels, restaurants, lodging, event management, and tourism) , Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) - equally suffered the brunt due to low consumption and production, downsizing, labour shortages etc. Businesses involving commercial or professional activities also slowed down. However, exceptions are the ICT (information and communications technology) and pharmaceutical (producing medicines, vaccines, etc.) and medical industry (producing masks, PPE etc.), chemical (producing sanitizers, disinfectants, etc.) based sectors that are flourishing to support the digital transactions and health issues respectively. In short, sectors requiring physical presence and mass involvement suffered the most. Inter-state and intra-state migration and huge displacement of labour force (especially in the informal sector) continued to undermine economic *security*.

When the economic base (basic income per head) of a family gets diminished the other aspects of life variedly feels the impact. Access to food (balanced diet) and safe drinking water at an economical rate becomes challenging for the commoners, resulting in malnutrition and low immunity. Given the present condition, food insecurity only decreases the prospect for *health security and personal security*. Due to the imposition of stringent measures (mentioned earlier) for deterring the transmission of the virus, family members had to confine themselves in their limited space for 24x7. This led to a continuous chain of events- uneven sharing of household chores, curtailment of expenses to the bare minimum, exposure to domestic abuse and violence, mental stress, psychological disorders. However, the worst sufferers include the most vulnerable lot- children, women and the aged persons. Due to joblessness of the male members, often the female members had to take up the additional tasks (namely, bread-earning, single- handedly look after the elderly, take care of their children's growing tantrums due to closure of schools, handle mood swings of other members) along with their daily mundane activities (like cooking, washing, mopping, cleaning and sanitizing) to sustain their livelihood.

Under such circumstances *political security* becomes more important. The measures taken by the governments across the globe had both negative and positive effects. In the name of minimizing the health hazards, governments were compelled to control the life of people in such a manner that it deprived them of minimum basic rights like freedom of movement and right to life and personal liberty. Again basic health care facilities were not made available to the mass due to lack of preparedness and poor infrastructural backup to absorb the repeated shockwaves of the virus. The Government measures to provide aid and assistance in the form of *rations*, relief and stimulus packages to sustain the economy and the individuals also proved insufficient. In addition to this, people had to follow *'social distancing'* norms in such an egoistic (self-centered) manner that further undermined their social responsibility (altruism). Most people chose to keep themselves locked up physically and *mentally*. In extreme cases they refused to accept the reality. Even they sacrificed their relationship with their kin and near ones. However, the front liners (doctors, nurses, medical practitioners, police, emergency service providers, various NGOs, and a *few individuals*) are the only ones who are continuously fighting the battle against the invisible enemy. This shows that apart from the few sensitive people, majority has lost the confidence of not only the government but also their fellow beings. This in turn is limiting the scope of *community security*.

III

Studies[9] conducted at the outset of the pandemic showed that many countries entered the COVID-19 crisis with many existing deprivations that hampered the achievements of SDGs, including high incidence of poverty and hunger, gaps in their public health infrastructure and access to basic services like clean drinking water and sanitation and inadequate social protection.

Some reports[10] published later showed that it is quite evident that the present situation is not conducive for the achievement of SDGs within the stipulated time frame. However, it is too early to come to a definite conclusion due to the outbreak of the second and probable third wave of the Covid-19. The strains from the second order are more severe in nature. As far the said report is concerned few observations are quite vivid. Though the virus has largely affected the economies of the poor countries but it has not been able take toll on the SDGs to a large extent. Amid slowed down progress in fulfillment of SDGs, environmental impact has been significantly positive due to declines in economic activity. While the world as a whole has made progress on the SDGs, countries in East and South Asia in particular have progressed the most and managed the Covid-19 more effectively .The study also revealed the importance of real-time information, and the focus on increasing data availability and reducing time lags in official statistics with the help of the research community and the private sector. So far the findings of the report is concerned, short term impacts to a certain extent stands measurable but the long term impact is unpredictable to a large extent. The following table shows the short term impact of Covid-19 on SDGs:

Table 1: *Short-term impact of Covid-19 and SDGs*

SDGs No.	Items covered	Reasons behind such impact rate	Impact rate (intensity)
1.	No poverty	job losses and economic lockdown	###
2.	Zero hunger	food insecurity, reduced food availability , food loss and waste due to transportation challenges, poorer nutrition	###
3.	Good health and well-being	Higher disease incidence, mortality ,overburdening of health systems from Covid 19 ,negative impact of confinement and lockdown on mental health	###
4.	Quality education	School and day-care closures, Loss of human capital, poorer nutrition due to interruption of school meals	$$
5.	Gender equality	disproportionate economic impacts on women (e.g., job losses), social impacts on women from the lockdown (e. g., domestic violence) ,higher mortality rates from the virus among men	$$
6.	Clean water and sanitation	Limited access to clean water ,limits on adherence to strict hygiene guidelines	$$

7.	Affordable and clean energy	Slowdown in economic growth ,a reduction in energy prices (e.g., oil),reduce incentives for renewable resources	$$
8.	Decent work and Economic growth	trade disruption, mass unemployment ,business closures / bankruptcies ,decline in tourism activities, massive public deficits	###
9.	Industry, innovation and infrastructure	possible nationalization of some industries, and bankruptcies and closures of others, scientific collaboration to find treatments and vaccine, accelerated uptake of digital technologies, for e-health, e-education, e-governance and e-payments	$$
10.	Reduced inequalities	disproportionate negative health and economic impacts on vulnerable groups(including refugees and migrants), loss of jobs of lower-skilled, lower-wage labour	###
11.	Sustainable cities and communities	rise in urban poverty and vulnerability, shut down of public transports, lower access to public / green spaces ,movements of population that vary across countries, sharp short-term reduction in pollution levels	$$
12.	Responsible consumption and production	short-term reduction in natural resource use due to reduced economic activity and consumption, pressure to loosen up regulations on circular economy and postpone the adoption of new measures, increased plastic pollution (e.g., used to produce personal protective equipment	?
13.	Climate action	short-term reduction in global GHG emissions, pressure to reduce environmental safeguards, lack of clarity on environmental investments, slowdown in economic growth contributing to reduction in energy prices (e.g., oil),which might increase access to energy but reduce incentives for renewable resources	?
14.	Life below water	short-term reduction in threats to marine biodiversity due to reduced global economic activity and consumption , pressure to reduce marine biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards	?
15.	Life on land	short-term reduction in threats to terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity due to reduced global economic activity and consumption, pressure to reduce terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards, including biodiversity and ecosystem regulations conventions (for instance, on deforestation)	?

16.	Peace, justice and strong institutions	increased pressure on governments to mitigate the health and economic consequences of the pandemic, pressure to increase accessible health care in countries that have not yet achieved universal health coverage , increased public deficits and debt disruption of legislative processes and public debates, suspension of freedom-of-information laws and transparency policies	$$
17.	Partnerships for the goals	possible reduced responsiveness of international aid community to needs of the poorest countries, possible reduction in international remittances and cross-border financing, closing of borders, slowdown in international trade, debt crisis	$$

denotes highly negative

$$ denotes mixed or moderately negative

? denotes impact still unclear

Source: Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2020). *Sustainable Development Report 2020. The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19*. Cambridge University Press.

If we go through the table, it becomes quite clear that just after the outbreak of Covid-19 and up to June 2020, the countries were apparently heading towards their SDGs in a slow but uneven manner. But we are yet to uncover as to how the countries across the globe going to reach their target at the end of 2030. There are many areas that require organized effort.

IV

From the above discussion it becomes evident that the impact of the pandemic has left the humanity in despair. Life - economic, social, cultural and political has changed its course in the wake of the spread of the viral disease. It has shaken the world from below. The main focus of our understanding and responsibility should be to build a more sustainable world. All the 17 SDGs taken together are sufficient but not absolute in nature. There are areas and measures that require timely restructuring. The pandemic has exposed the dark side of our developmental approach and the allied insecurities. No development is possible at the cost of security. If humans are not secured then what is the use of securing our territory.

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 492.

6. The Brandt Commission (popularly known as Independent Commission on International Development Issues) was established in 1977 to examine the world's development needs in the 1980s and beyond that. The commission published a report that an understanding of the economic development for both the East and the West are dissimilar. Later, the Brundtland Commission created by the UN in 1983 paved the way for sustainable development that was to serve the nations in their common interest to save the human environment and natural resources and prevent further deterioration of social and economic development. The Commission on Global Governance, established in 1992, provided a definition of global governance 'is the sum of many ways individuals and institutions , public and private manage their common affair …it includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest'. These commissions and their reports widened the notion of traditional security.

   Brandt Commission   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brandt_Report

   Brundtland Commission https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Commission

   The Commission on Global Governance

   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commission_on_Global_Governance

7. The Millennium Development Goals (eight goals) were agreed upon in 2000 by the United Nations Millennium Summit in order to shape the 21st century world and achieve those goals by 2015. The goals included- i) eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, ii) achievement of universal primary education, iii) promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, iv) reduction of child mortality, v) improvement of mental health, vi) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, vii) maintenance of environmental sustainability, and viii) development of global partnership.

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