



Reflections on the Impact of Pandemics on People, Places and Communities: A Social Science Interdisciplinary Conference



Organized by
Pandemic Precarity:
North South Dialogues Research Team

In Collaboration with
Department of Geography, Loreto College,
Kolkata, India

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Funded by
Social Science Research Council, U.S.A

In Collaboration with
Department of Geography, Loreto College,
Kolkata, India
July 26-27, 2023

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***Reflections on the Impact of Pandemics on People, Places
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Conference***

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>Introduction</i>	vii
1 “America is My Home, Too”: A Punjabi Immigrant Community in Mid-Western Ohio Redefining Precarity, Boundaries, and Belonging During COVID-19 Lockdown <i>Jaita Talukdar</i>	13
2 People on the Move: Internal Migrants and Covid-19 <i>Anushyama Mukherjee</i>	15
3 The Efficacy of ZMET as a Tool to Understand Covid-Induced Migrant Precarity <i>Anand Venkatesh and Vidya Anand</i>	16
4 Crafting relatedness: Citizen Aid in Kolkata during the Covid 19 Pandemic <i>Shoma Choudhury Lahiri</i>	18
5 Vaccine Approvals during a Health Emergency: Lessons from the Covid-19 Epidemic <i>Biju Paul Abraham</i>	20
6 Unseen by All: The Invisibility of High-Skilled Temporary Indian Immigrants in the US during Covid <i>Rianka Roy and Bandana Purkayastha</i>	22
7 Exchanging ‘Care’: Exploring Coping Strategies in/through the Covid-19 Pandemic among Indian students in Higher Educational Institutions <i>Maria Anne Fitzgerald</i>	23
8 Pandemic, Persons with Disabilities and Resurgent Networks <i>Nandini Ghosh</i>	25

9	From Beneficiaries to Actors: Transformative Journeys of Women through Local Community Organizing During the Pandemic	26
	<i>Sayantoni Datta</i>	
10	The Pandemic and the People: Reflections on the Impact of Lockdowns on India's Legal Profession	27
	<i>Debasree Sinha</i>	
11	Transnational Caregiving and Care Receiving Among Asian Indian Immigrants in the USA During the COVID-19 Pandemic	29
	<i>Elizabeth Chacko</i>	
12	Invisibility and Experiences of Inequality in Times of Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis of Women Workers' Experiences in South India	30
	<i>S. Anandhi</i>	
13	How has the pandemic impacted work-life balance among higher skilled Indian immigrants in USA	33
	<i>Soma Chaudhuri, Elizabeth Chacko & Paromita Sanyal</i>	

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Introduction

In December 2019 when Wuhan city, Hubei Province, China, reported its first case of a peculiar pneumonia-like fever, the rest of the world remained oblivious to the fatal catastrophe that would unfold the following year. As the number of such cases rose in the area, the Chinese authorities identified the cause of the disease as an outbreak of a new coronavirus. With over 100,000 infections reported across 100 and more countries the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a full-blown pandemic on 11, March 2020. By the end of that month vast proportions of the global population across nations were placed under lockdown restrictions in an effort to contain what was called the Coronavirus 2019 or Covid-19 pandemic. Over the next two years humanity endured unprecedented suffering, loss of life, economic impoverishment, and profound transformation of the human psyche; before the world would gradually emerge into the “new normal” in 2023.

For several decades the Department of Geography at Loreto College has molded generations of young geographers. The spirit of inquiry into the unknown and the uncharted has been the driving force of this department. During the pandemic lockdowns the faculty members themselves had experienced the vicissitudes of living and teaching through a protracted period of uncertainty, while simultaneously motivating students to remain resilient as Covid-19 raged on. When Loreto College finally opened its doors to in-

person teaching, the Department of Geography felt a sense of responsibility in critically reflecting on the pandemic years and the indelible imprint it had left on people, places, and communities.

The year 2023 was particularly significant for the Department – its sixtieth year as an Honours Department. Early discussions began around organizing an academic conference or seminar to commemorate this milestone. Mrs. Sharmila Ray Kumam, the seniormost faculty of the Department (now retired) is renowned among her peers for her industry, networking skills, interpersonal intelligence, pragmatism and the ability to facilitate matters in favour of the Department. She began extensively communicating with friends-cum-colleagues in academia, many of whom are Loreto alumnae based in foreign universities. These discussions revealed a keen interest among many international scholars in collaborating with an institution from the developing world or the Global South on an academic event focused on reflecting on the pandemic. Loreto College, Kolkata with its century-old legacy of contribution to women's education; and its distinguished Department of Geography would be a perfect partner. Through further interactions with close friend and illustrious geographer, Professor Elizabeth Chacko of The George Washington University, Mrs. Ray Kumam was eventually introduced to two outstanding scholars, Professor Bandana Purkayastha of University of Connecticut and Professor Soma Chaudhuri of Michigan State University. A shared history unified the four academics – all raised in an old city in the Global South and educated in institutions with over hundred years of excellence in higher learning. At the time, Professors Chaudhuri (PI), Purkayastha (Co-PI) and Chacko (Co-PI) had an existing grant titled, "*Pandemic Precarity*:"

North South Dialogues” funded by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), USA, where they were working with a team of interdisciplinary faculty from institutions in India (Madras Institute of Development Studies; IRMA, Gujarat) and USA (University of Cincinnati; Florida State University) to develop an interdisciplinary methodological toolkit to study migrant precarity in the international context. Through multiple phone conversations and meetings with the PI and Co-PIs of the SSRC grant, and a most memorable visit of Professor Soma Chaudhuri to the Department at Loreto College the stage was finally set for the realization of a common dream to host a 2-day conference and workshop on research around the impact of Covid-19 on humans and spaces. Faculty members of the Department of Geography under the dynamic and visionary leadership of Mrs. Ray Kumam (who joined the SSRC team as Consultant) and Professor Chaudhuri meticulously planned what would evolve into an international conference as well as a workshop on the pandemic’s impact and data collection methods during times of such crises. The goal was for a mega event that would bring together academic professionals and scholars from India and abroad, along with faculty, students, and alumnae of the Department of Geography at Loreto College. The forging of lasting connections and collaborations is often the outcome of collective willingness. And this in turn brings in overwhelming generosity. The funding for the international conference and workshop was made possible by the SSRC grant.

On July 26, 2023 *“Reflections on the Impact of Pandemics on People, Places and Communities: A Social Science Interdisciplinary and International Conference”* organized by *Pandemic Precarity: North South Dialogues* research

team in collaboration with Department of Geography, Loreto College, Kolkata, India became a culmination of months of animated discussion, enthusiastic deliberations, diligent planning, and funding made possible by the SSRC grant. The collective goodwill of faculty engaged in institutions across two different countries and continents, brought this project to fruition. A shared vision crystallized.

The conference saw thirteen interdisciplinary research presentations spanning a wide range of social science disciplines that focused on how Covid-19 had affected communities in India and abroad. Through four chaired sessions the multidimensionality of the pandemic was fervently debated through cross-sectoral and intersectional lenses. From unskilled migrant labourers to educated, technologically adept workforce; from employed workers to non-working students, from women professionals to persons with disabilities, from inequalities to citizens' aid, from vaccine trials to coping strategies, from caregiving to work-life balance – the conference was a single platform of amalgam of the widest spectrum of Covid-19 centric research.

The following day, July 27, 2023 a workshop on “*Pandemics and Methods of Data Collection: Challenges, Innovation and Lessons Learned*” was held under the same banner. The workshop was introduced by Professor Soma Chaudhuri and Mrs. Sharmila Ray Kumam, representing the SSRC and Loreto College respectively, and included presentations and reflections from members of the SSRC team. The panel comprised eminent social scientists – Soma Chaudhuri (Michigan State University), Elizabeth Chacko (The George Washington University), Paromita Sanyal (Florida State University), Anand Venkatesh (Institute of Rural

Management, Anand), Vidya Anand (Independent Scholar), Jaita Talukdar (Loyola University, New Orleans), Bandana Purkayastha (University of Connecticut), and S. Anandhi (Madras Institute of Development Studies). Another segment of the workshop, titled “*Education, Exposure, and Experience: The Role of Department of Geography in Human Capital Creation*” featured presentations by students and alumnae of the Department. These accounts highlighted how rigorous training and methodological learning during field work have enhanced intellectual capacities and research aptitude of students over the course of decades.

Supported by the SSRC grant, the Department of Geography, Loreto College hosted and participated in a singular international conference that brought together diverse scholarly perspectives. The conference created a space for the union of uncommon erudition of eminent social scientists. It underscored and foregrounded the lived experiences of communities during Covid-19. It explored pathways towards resilience in the face of public health emergencies. The unfolding academic dialogues enabled attendees to reflect on the bygone pandemic era through a critical, objective, scientific, and neutral viewpoint; balanced by an empathetic, solution-oriented, social, human, and emotional lens. The event reinforced a vital lesson – pandemics may be rare but they remain an enduring reality. However, it is our coping strategies, cooperation, emotional intelligence, human spirit, perseverance, together with continued scientific progress that will shape the resilience of societies in future.

1

“America is My Home, Too”: A Punjabi Immigrant Community in Mid-Western Ohio Redefining Precarity, Boundaries, and Belonging During COVID-19 Lockdown

Presenter: Jaita Talukdar, Associate Professor of Sociology, Loyola University New Orleans, USA

Abstract:

Research on South Asian immigrants in the United States has extensively documented the fault lines on which immigrants walk managing cultural assimilation, racial subordination, and transnational family obligations. For low-income ethnic immigrants, who tend to work in the service industry, a lower occupational and ethnic status mean that attempts at assimilation do not guarantee that they “will ever really belong” (Dhingra 2010; Mitra 2020). COVID lockdown was expected to further weaken the fault lines or the vulnerabilities low-income immigrants experience, by threatening their economic livelihoods and taking away their ability to work and social spaces in which their work and social identities are formed. Based on a qualitative analysis using flexible coding of fifteen interviews of a Punjabi immigrant community (female=7, male=8), employed in the Indian restaurant business in a mid-western city of Ohio, I found a different narrative than what constitutes as migrant precarity. The pandemic had predictability resulted in stressors such as uncertainty of work, social isolation, and disruption in carework, but it did not sufficiently destabilize

their lives. Instead, their work culture, homeownership and citizenship status strengthened their narratives of belonging to their host country. This paper's main goal is to explain how lessons in pre-pandemic hardships mitigated some of the excesses of precarity that is typically experienced by low-income migrant groups during the pandemic.

Keywords: South Asian immigrants; ethnic belonging; precarity; South Asian businesses; COVID lockdown.

2

People on the Move: Internal Migrants and Covid-19

Presenter: Anushyama Mukherjee, Assistant Professor of Sociology, St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, India

Abstract:

The complete national lockdown declared on the 24th March 2020 to combat the COVID-19 pandemic had led to millions losing their livelihood and consequently, caused the largest migration of people in India's history after the Partition. With umpteen numbers of migrant workers being stranded and walking back home from the urban centers in 2020 and 2021, they lacked basic amenities such as food, health services, shelter, hygiene and sanitation. All along, they were burdened with financial precarity— since most migrant workers were reportedly informal, daily wage earners, they were bereft of any social protection. As a result, migrant workers stand out as the most vulnerable group during the ongoing pandemic. Broadly, there are three types of migrants noticed at that time- groups that were stranded in their places of work, groups and individuals who had started their return to their natives and groups and individuals who had already returned to their natives. Issues and challenges were different for each category. At this outset, this paper is going to present a few in depth cases of migrant laborers from different parts of the country by focusing on a variety of coping mechanisms that they had taken to simply survive during the first lockdown. Methodologically, in-depth interviews were conducted with informal migrant laborers in the year 2020.

Keywords: migration, informality, COVID-19, coping mechanisms.

3

The Efficacy of ZMET as a Tool to Understand Covid-Induced Migrant Precarity

Presenters: Anand Venkatesh, Professor of Economics, Institute of Rural Management, India; Vidya Anand Independent Researcher, India

Abstract:

The COVID pandemic had a significant negative influence on the entire world, including India. Migrant workers were particularly hard hit by its effects. In India, migrant workers leave their homes in pursuit of work in their own state or in other relatively prosperous states. While media coverage addressed the issue, the researchers hypothesized that there might be deeper aspects of migrant precarity concealed in their psyche, necessitating specialized tools for exploration. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how well the use of the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) revealed the underlying dimensions and constructs of migrant precarity caused by COVID. The ZMET method makes use of metaphors to obtain insights into underlying associations and thoughts pertaining to precarity. Participants in in-depth interviews were shown a variety of randomly generated photos as stimuli in order to elicit analogies and ideas about their pandemic experiences. This approach aimed to access profound and often unconscious levels of personal experiences and understanding that are challenging to capture through traditional interviews or surveys. The study interviewed fifteen migrant laborers in Gujarat, a state in western India. Data were analyzed by creating individual

concept maps of precarity and ultimately generating a collective concept map. The interviews demonstrated the potency of ZMET in revealing previously unrecognized aspects of migrant precarity by delving into the participants subconscious. However, it must also be acknowledged that ZMET was difficult to perform since it requires knowledgeable interviewers with keen awareness and patience in order to effectively connect with the participants on numerous facets of migrant precarity.

Keywords: migration, informality, COVID-19, coping mechanisms.

4

***Crafting relatedness:
Citizen Aid in Kolkata during the
Covid 19 Pandemic***

Presenter: Shoma Choudhury Lahiri, Assistant Professor of Sociology St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata, India

Abstract:

The Covid 19 Pandemic elicited a wide variety of responses from individuals, communities, nation states and public health authorities, some of which have continued even in the post pandemic context. While the command-and-control measures that enhanced different forms of surveillance have been dwelt upon, the pandemic also witnessed a wide variety of altruistic acts from citizens and communities the world over, which remain relatively undocumented. This paper attempts to understand the nature and motivation underlying citizen's aid in Kolkata during the Covid 19 pandemic, and even in the post pandemic context. How do we understand these interventions? Are these acts of citizenship or ways of claiming agency in a context of institutional exhaustion/failure ? Drawing from interviews of individual citizens and groups and on published literature on public participation during the Covid 19 pandemic, the paper would attempt to highlight the intersecting social, political, moral and philosophical reasons which propelled individuals and groups to participate in organizing and distributing varying forms of aid at a time when social distancing was advocated as the norm. The significance of such individual and collective acts

lie in the fact that they act as resources of hope for building solidarity in an increasingly fractured world.

Keywords: Citizenship, care, agency, solidarity, pandemic.

5

***Vaccine Approvals during a Health
Emergency: Lessons from the Covid-19
Epidemic***

Presenter: Biju Paul Abraham, Professor of Public Policy & Management Group, Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, India

Abstract:

Approvals for new drugs and vaccines usually involve compliance with complex protocols. Candidate drugs and vaccines are put through a series of efficacy and safety trials, and the time taken from development of a drug or vaccine to large-scale deployment can be as much as a decade. The Covid-19 pandemic forced governments to adopt a quicker path to vaccine acceptance and deployment. This involved emergency approvals without the full regime of safety and efficacy trials. The study of longer-term effects of the vaccines often began once they had been administered to significant numbers of their citizens. Developing countries faced a further challenge. They were forced to accept and roll out vaccines despite relatively poorer capabilities for vaccine evaluation. The paper considers the challenges faced by developing countries, particularly India, in processing regulatory approvals for vaccines. It will consider the approvals process for Covid-19 vaccines in the context of earlier controversies relating to faster vaccine approval processes – in particular the approvals of a vaccine called Dengvaxia which was developed to fight Dengue. It will also discuss some policy-changes that would help governments

respond faster to such emergencies in future. The paper will be based on a survey of secondary literature related to the pandemic and pandemic responses.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic; Covid-19 vaccines; Vaccine Clinical Trials; Public Health Emergencies.

6

***Unseen by All: The Invisibility of
High-Skilled Temporary Indian Immigrants in
the US during Covid***

Presenters: Rianka Roy, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Wake Forest University, USA; Bandana Purkayastha, Professor of Sociology, University of Connecticut, USA

Abstract:

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated migrant precarity and affected even high-skilled temporary Indian immigrants in the US (on visas like H-1B, L-1 and F-1). The dual impact the global health crisis and existing racialized visa policies constrained high-skilled immigrant workers' economic and social opportunities. Those in the queue for decades seeking permanent residency in the US experienced further delays in the process; but those whose employment-visa expired during the pandemic were barely granted extensions to either transition to new visa categories or to self-deport. These stories emerged in our interviews with high-skilled temporary immigrants from India, working in the US. But they remained absent from the mainstream media in the US, when we looked at over 900 news reports. More striking perhaps is that these stories appeared nowhere even in the diaspora newspapers—published by and for Indian immigrants in the US. We examine how specific immigrant groups can remain overlooked by multiple social and political actors, including their potential allies.

Keywords: High-skilled temporary immigrants; Visa precarity; COVID-19 pandemic; Indian diaspora media; Racialized immigration policy.

Exchanging ‘Care’: Exploring Coping Strategies in/through the Covid-19 Pandemic among Indian students in Higher Educational Institutions

Presenter: Maria Anne Fitzgerald, Senior Writing Fellow, Ashoka University, India

Abstract:

During the Covid-19 pandemic, spaces of learning within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were shifted onto online learning platforms, digital communication media, groups on instant messaging apps, and other collaborative platforms. Recent literature on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education systems documents the adverse impact of this change on the well-being of educators and students in local and global contexts (Lai et al. 2020; Firang 2020; Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma, and Singh 2021; Dayal 2023). However, less is known of the way in which students mobilized themselves to ‘exchange care’ by building spaces of solidarity and support. This paper foregrounds this understudied aspect by contending that while online modes promoted learning in ‘physically and socially distant’ environments, they simultaneously facilitated caring practices among students in ‘isolated’ learning spaces. By adopting an auto ethnographical approach and through personal communications with Indian students enrolled in HEIs in India and abroad, the paper describes their coping strategies while pursuing studies in/through the Covid-19 pandemic. Examples of these practices include seeking

advice from friends/peers, making time for leisure activities, staying optimistic, caring pedagogies and diversifying social networks.

Keywords: higher education, care, Covid-19, India, coping strategies.

8

Pandemic, Persons with Disabilities and Resurgent Networks

Presenter: Nandini Ghosh, Assistant Professor of Sociology
Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, India

Abstract:

COVID 19 pandemic destabilized lives in multifarious ways. Both the lockdown and the pandemic were experienced in varied ways by people from different impairment categories, rural-urban contexts and socio-economic groups. Inadequate access to food, medicines, sanitizers and care stemmed from poor access to documents and government systems. Cramped living spaces, concerns over sanitization and masking, and social distancing destabilized routines created pressure on disabled people and their families. With an almost absent state, NGOs and disability networks stepped in to collaborate and reach out to local disabled people in different contexts to provide food and other support, especially in rural areas. This social solidarity, wherein networks were further cemented by normative obligations facilitated collective empathetic action (Hechter 2001). This paper explores the social solidarity and collective building efforts during the pandemic with reference to disability. While the first section of the paper will use public documents such as newspapers and online reports to elaborate the disadvantage experienced by persons with disabilities and their families, the second part of the paper will use a case study of the Covid Crisis Support.

Keywords: disabled people, isolation, networks.

9

From Beneficiaries to Actors: Transformative Journeys of Women through Local Community Organizing During the Pandemic

Presenter: Sayantoni Datta, Independent Researcher, India

Abstract:

The World Health Organization announced that COVID 19 had spread across 113 countries and would soon become a pandemic, towards the end of January 2020. From a public health perspective, poor early detection and delayed response to the disease seemed to have led to this crisis. After the announcement, several countries put in place different kinds of containment strategies. How far each of these containment strategies have proved effective in reducing the spread of the disease are still being studied widely. In India, lockdowns, social distancing, are examples of the strategies used through the first wave and second wave of COVID. The following paper discusses the socio-economic impact of these containment strategies and lessons learnt from local community organizing by women daily wage workers and sharecroppers from climate impacted communities, in southern West Bengal, India. The paper highlights, the transformative journeys of these women community members, becoming actors rather than beneficiaries, as they responded to this crisis. The paper traces these journeys made during the pandemic and the efforts used thereafter towards building systems of resilience.

Keywords: Resilience, Community-organizing, Gender, Climate, Agriculture.

10

The Pandemic and the People: Reflections on the Impact of Lockdowns on India's Legal Profession

Presenter: Debasree Sinha, Assistant Professor of Geography, Loreto College, Kolkata, India

Abstract:

Covid-19 viral disease assumed catastrophic proportions in the early part of 2020. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a pandemic in March 2020. Lockdowns in the form of closure of non-essential establishments, restrictions on mobility, and suspension of transport services; were imposed in most nations as a counter measure of viral containment. The Indian Government responded with four successive lockdowns from March 25 to May 31, 2020. This paper reflects on the experiences and challenges faced by legal professionals, during these lockdowns. It is based on the interviews of lawyers from the east Indian city of Kolkata, conducted in April-June 2023. From these discussions and conversations two emergent aspects are highlighted – the impediments faced by Indian Courts in putting a digital system in place; and the acute financial distress of a section of lawyers. The disparate financial impacts of differential pay-cuts introduced by various solicitors' firms, coupled with the truncated functioning of Courts, on a group of lawyers are revealed. The paper also establishes that a void exists in academic research on this particular category of highly

skilled professionals. The author concludes that in the post Covid-19 academic dialogues in India, on the impact of the pandemic, legal professionals are largely unrepresented.

Keywords: pandemic, lockdown, legal profession, experiences, challenges.

11

Transnational Caregiving and Care Receiving Among Asian Indian Immigrants in the USA During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Presenter: Elizabeth Chacko, Professor of Geography & International Affairs, The George Washington University, USA

Abstract:

In this paper I examine and analyze transnational caregiving and care receiving practices of high-skilled Asian Indian first-generation immigrants living in the USA during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper is based on data obtained from interviews conducted via Zoom with 30 Asian Indian immigrants varying in age from 34 to 66 years. The sample was selected through a combination of the snowball technique and convenience sampling. Findings indicate that emerging obstacles in transnational care for relatives in India, along with state and self-imposed social isolation meant that practices of care had to be reconfigured. The experiences of Asian-Indian immigrants in the United States in this study highlight the importance of interdependence and the mutuality of care. Along with community networks, social media connections played a crucial role in managing and providing transnational care. However, inconsistent and changing policies around COVID protocols and vaccine and booster regulations created additional stress on immigrants tasked with managing care across nations.

Keywords: transnational care, Asian Indian immigrants, COVID-19 pandemic, USA.

12

Invisibility and Experiences of Inequality in Times of Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis of Women Workers' Experiences in South India.

Presenter: S. Anandhi, Professor Emerita of History, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, India

Abstract:

Paulo Freire noted in his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed / Critical Pedagogy', that the marginalized group's lived experiences, behavior and their view of the world and their ethics should form the aspects of critical knowledge of any event that affect them. While much has been said about labor precarity, this paper argues that precarity needs to be situated in the world view of the laborers, in particular Dalit women laborers who experienced multiple forms of violence and precarity and yet invisible in official and unofficial accounts due to their embeddedness in the precarious unorganized sector works and due to their 'low caste' identity. Covid -19 triggered transformation of the world of work, lives and suffering: Those of us privileged enough to be able to work remotely and retain our jobs and those deemed essential who continued to work outside their homes and those deemed nonessential were laid off. Those whose work was essential were also invisible and their values of collective caregiving (if I care for others my children will be cared for and contrast this with if an individual falls sick we are potentially sick) was also made invisible by neo-liberal states which continue to divide us on the basis of our work, caste and gender. The sanitary workers, the low waged, under class low caste workers

endured the greatest precarity and face new and heightened workplace hazards. The question that this paper asks is how do we foreground these new experiences of precarity and what role intersectionality play in these differential experiences of precarity? There is temporal component of precarity for workers whose work hours increased and schedules became more predictable during the pandemic, accompanied by heightened unpredictability of daily tasks. In other words, there is precarious stability in sanitary work which is uncertain with short-term scheduling and hours stability but increased unpredictability of daily tasks. The temporal precarity faced by lower caste, low wage workers' families heightened women workers' precarity: workers who were laid off during the pandemic were still linked to their employers despite being technically unemployed. They were left in a state of temporal uncertainty that discouraged them from seeking a different job or even thinking themselves as 'unemployed'. What do the precariousness of Dalit women labor offer for us as learning about violence and precarity? How do we engage with the lived experiences of precariousness of hitherto invisible racialized marginalized women in order to learn and understand and educate ourselves on complexities of the crisis? Can there be an universal value to sufferings and experiences of pandemic? Why particularities and contextual meanings of sufferings are needed to re-center the lives and productive labor of the marginalized? Can we pay attention to the voices of the racialized and marginalized women? What would that mean to listen to these voices as pedagogies for the future? These are some questions that will be discussed in this paper. Using the qualitative data collected through various methods this paper first highlights the invisibility of labour performed

by women during the pandemic and second it analyses the multiple forms of precarity experienced by women workers in the unorganized sector of work and at home during the Pandemic. While mapping the methods of data collection, the paper attempts to discuss the need for a critical knowledge generation on intersectional experiences of Pandemic by women.

Keywords: Intersectional precarity; Dalit women labor; Critical pedagogy; Lived experience and knowledge production; Pandemic and unorganized work.

13

How has the pandemic impacted work-life balance among higher skilled Indian immigrants in USA

Presenters: Soma Chaudhuri, Associate Professor of Sociology, Michigan State University, USA; Elizabeth Chacko, Professor of Geography, The George Washington University, USA; Paromita Sanyal, Professor of Sociology, Florida State University, USA

Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically restructured the contours of work, family, and wellbeing, yet much of the scholarship has overlooked the experiences of higher-skilled immigrants who, despite their relative privilege, faced distinctive forms of disruption. This study examines how the pandemic reshaped work-life balance among higher-skilled Asian Indian immigrants in the United States, with particular attention to the intersection of gender, work, and family. Drawing on in-depth online interviews with eighteen participants (fourteen women and four men) residing across major U.S. metropolitan areas, the study explores the emotional, physical, and relational consequences of prolonged lockdowns, travel restrictions, and remote work. Findings reveal that the pandemic blurred the spatial and temporal boundaries between professional and domestic life, intensifying gendered divisions of labor and heightening stress around caregiving, productivity, and social isolation. Women, in particular, bore disproportionate burdens as childcare and household responsibilities expanded, often

leading to physical exhaustion, psychological strain, and career compromises. The impossibility of visiting or assisting family in India during a health crisis compounded anxiety and grief, while racialized fears amplified feelings of vulnerability and alienation. Despite their economic security, participants' narratives expose the precarious emotional and social dimensions of immigrant life under crisis conditions. The study underscores the need to reconceptualize work-life balance as a gendered, transnational, and affective process, shaped not only by labor markets but also by global inequalities, family ties, and racialized belonging.

Keywords: Work-life balance; High-skilled immigrants; Gender and carework; COVID-19 pandemic; Transnational family dynamics.

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