

# Who to blame for this Tandava?

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May 1, 2021

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Words fail to describe the trauma that one goes through these days watching images of burning pyres which are found to be insufficient to cope with the large number of deaths due to Covid19. The cremation grounds are full and spaces outside, even in public parks, are being used for cremation. Ditto for burial grounds. It looks like Shiva, the god of death is doing his Tandava or death-dance. How could this happen when we crossed the first round of the epidemic in a rather tolerable way is the million-dollar question. Who to blame for this dismal, or rather horrendous state of affairs? The mismanagement the current Corona epidemic has led to disillusion with the leadership and the frustration is leading people to blame even the system. While the leaders keep on changing in a democracy, disillusionment with the democratic system is a more serious sentiment. For this, one needs to ponder seriously about the role played by different stakeholders.

Executive leadership is the organ of government that comes to mind first of all when is blamed for this catastrophe. Prime Minister Modi has been widely hailed as an able administrator who normally plans well and sticks to the roadmap. At the same time, one cannot forget that he is also a shrewd politician who, puts on punching gloves when situation demands and in a democracy, elections provide such an opportunity – quite often in our country. This streak in his character does not always bring credit to him, as for example, his several election meetings in West Bengal which were taken by some as a proof of his indifference towards the management of the pandemic whose victims have been growing in geometrical progression. Why only the prime minister, chief ministers and leaders of all parties taking part in elections in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry are equally to blame. Covid times demanded no big gatherings. When the cases surged, even small gatherings posed danger. But the temptation to win elections is so strong in our politicians of all hues that they can disregard all sane advice.

Election Commission is the other constitutional body whose role rightly came in for a dressing down by several high courts. The remarks of the Madras High Court were indeed sharp and scathing when it asked the EC representative if they lived on another planet, and suggested that they should be charged with murder. These observations by the judiciary indeed acted as a balm on the bruised spirit of general public and showed a glimmer of light in the darkening scenario.

Leaving aside the reasons for the spread of the deadly virus, the present scenario with shortage of oxygen, medicines, hospital beds, ventilators, etc. has become the cause of blame game between the centre and the states. While the states say that the Dept. of Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade was to supervise ramping up oxygen production as decided by the Empowered Group VI in April 2020, the centre claims to have allowed state governments in January 2021 to take decisions according to the situation prevailing in their respective states and had also released money for 162 oxygen plants but states dithered on installing and operating the plants in time. The final truth may for ever remain shrouded in mystery but what landed in the public domain was the Supreme Court's recent criticism of the central government as also Delhi High Court's admonishment of the Delhi government for the poor management of the crisis.

To this murky scenario is added the nefarious trade practices of certain unscrupulous traders who are exploiting the dire situation to make money. Hoarding and blackmarket of oxymeters, Remdesivir injections, oxygen cylinders and concentrators, etc. has become the order of the day. The authorities concerned are not able to control the situation. There was the report in today's papers about the arrest of some persons selling fake Remdesivir injections. Already they have sold some 800 pieces at the rate of Rs. 20000-35000 each! Can one imagine a more inhuman scenario? And this is happening in a country where we pride ourselves on our spiritual legacy and cultural nurturing and all that!

In contrast are the doctors and the Corona warriors who are struggling hard to help the patients. How some of them have gone hungry and sleepless discharging their duty evokes our deep respect for them. Videos of some young doctors crying over the death of patients they could not help are indeed poignant reminders of reality. Several NGOs with their dedicated members have been providing food and medicines to helpless Covid-infected families at their doorsteps, and arranging blood and plasma donations at the cost of their own lives. They are the ones who retain our faith in humanity.

How about the public at large? Isn't it too an accomplice in the sordid situation? Indeed, a large segment of society has turned a deaf ear to warnings about the dangers. Still many go unmasked to market and don't care two hoots about sanitizing hands and objects. Shall we point the finger at those who follow their favourite leaders and swell election rallies, or the devout ones who must visit a Kumbh Mela or perform prayers at crowded places without caring for the social (read 'physical') distancing?

These are indeed testing times for democracy. The leaders must listen to the sane voice of courts and be serious about their work. They must lead the people in right direction and not be led by petty considerations. The people at large must realize the worth of staying apart to avoid infection and yet coming together to help efforts to assist the victims by all possible means. Unless this happens, the general mood of depression and frustration will only erode faith in the democratic system.

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