CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Arash Fazli and Amitabh Kundu

The present volume is the outcome of a series of online seminars organised by the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development at Devi Ahilya University, Indore, to explore the second-order effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on India's most vulnerable populations. The consequences of the pandemic in terms of the millions of deaths and the adverse impact on social and economic development around the world have been well-documented. India has been one among the worst-affected countries on account of the loss of both lives and livelihoods.

The premise underlying this series of seminars was that like every major global crisis, the disruption caused by the pandemic held within it the seeds of profound social and economic transformation. The disorientation, shock and anxiety that it triggered led to both a desire to return to 'normalcy' as soon as possible as well as a disturbing consciousness

A. Fazli (✉)
Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore, India
e-mail: arashfazli.nalanda@dauniv.ac.in

A. Kundu
World Resources Institute, New Delhi, India

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of how far our present social and economic order has drifted from the long-cherished principles of justice, solidarity, mutual collaboration and environmental stewardship that constitute the essential prerequisites of healthy, harmonious and prosperous collective existence. The pandemic exposed the alarming levels of systemic injustices lying just below the veneer of everyday, middle-class existence. This was evident in the acute precarity that all those on the wrong side of the caste, class, gender, religious and ethnic divide had to endure as a consequence of the pandemic. Similarly, while the transmission of zoonotic viruses such as SARS-CoV 2 is not a new phenomenon, the rapid increase in the frequency of their emergence and the pace of their spread in recent decades as a result of anthropogenic factors was a stark reminder of the catastrophic consequences of human depredations of nature in the age of the Anthropocene. The pandemic had thus exposed how unnatural and unsound our conception of the 'normal' had become.

The crisis also showed how ill-prepared we were for the unique challenges of the highly globalised world of the twenty-first century. Like climate change, this crisis was planetary in scale and an effective response to it required the entire human family to act with a degree of unity of thought and action that the world had never seen before. As the Colombian economist Mauricio Cárdenas observed comparing the crises of today with those of the past:

> We seemingly live in a permanent state of danger. Crises are no longer isolated tail-risk events that affect a few. They are much more frequent, multidimensional, and interdependent, and – because they transcend national borders – have the potential to affect everyone simultaneously…(N)o individual country's actions will resolve today's crises, much less prevent new ones. Today's crises, …are interdependent and truly global in scope, with a potentially much greater impact. …(S)olutions no longer depend exclusively on the competence of national economic authorities. Addressing them effectively requires leadership and action between governments around the world. (Cárdenas, 2022, paras. 2–6)

As Cardenas points out, the pandemic made nation states—their leaders and citizens—much more acutely conscious of the extent to which the welfare of their nation or group depended on the welfare of humanity as a whole. Even if one section of humankind did not participate in the steps needed to overcome the crisis, it could imperil the well-being of the whole.

Rapid advances in transportation and communication technologies and increasing international trade have created a world tied together in dense networks of interrelationships where any change in one part has ripple effects on the rest in unpredictable ways. With tightening bonds of global interconnectedness, the social, political and economic systems of our world which were conceived and created in earlier centuries for a world of sovereign nation-states are increasingly exposed to global forces pushing them towards levels of interdependence and complexity for which they were not designed. A fundamental challenge of our times made evident by the pandemic is to adapt these systems to evolving global realities in the direction of greater collaboration and cooperation, mutual support, justice and environmental sustainability rather than conflict, extreme inequality and the plundering of nature.

This context of a world in rapid transition with structures that need to evolve in response to the forces of history provided the background for the reflections in this volume on social and economic development in post-COVID India. This historical context has profound implications for the nature and scope of change that development is envisioned to achieve. By exposing the fragile foundations of the present social and economic order, the pandemic took the discourse on development back to the fundamental normative questions of who we are as human beings, what we owe each other as members of society, what principles should guide our relationship with the natural world in which we are embedded and what must be our conception of a good society towards which the processes of development should help us advance. The responses to these questions needed to be addressed and articulated in the context of the changing realities of a world being drastically transformed by the processes of globalisation, of technological development, of environmental degradation and of identity politics.

The sixteen papers in this volume cover a wide range of themes from fields in the social sciences and humanities including history, economics, labour reform, unemployment, water governance, food and nutrition security, rural development, urbanisation, epistemic justice, gender studies, tribal studies and public health. The authors of these papers shed light on some of the most pressing questions that have been raised within their fields by the disruption caused by the pandemic and they propose insights and interventions that can provide the contours for a new development paradigm that must emerge based on the principles of

social and economic justice, environmental sustainability and inter-group unity and collaboration.

With regard to the papers in this volume, in her paper 'Summoning the Collective Will and Courage to Seek Economic Justice' Holly Hanson examines the role of human agency in creating economic institutions based on norms and values. She views the pandemic as a historical opportunity to break out of 'path dependence' and reclaim society's sense of agency to create institutions that promote and perpetuate values conducive to individual and collective well-being. She makes her point by contrasting the joint stock limited liability company, an institution created to help the privileged amass wealth while being protected from losses or from accountability, with *commenda*, a late-medieval economic institution that pioneered the concept of profit-sharing and equal partnership of capital and labour. While the former perpetuated greed and conflict, the latter created trust, harmony, cooperation and generosity. Hanson argues that a great force for social transformation lies locked up within the unawakened consciousness of the masses who are heedless of their power to create the kind of society they want to live in. As people become conscious of their power of agency and learn to use it to create a world that embodies their shared values, they begin to write an alternative future for themselves and for generations to come. The process, while difficult and complex, is not unachievable. Hanson suggests that to work as a conscious agent of long-term change towards a more just and united world requires courage and a commitment to learning through collective action and reflection.

While Hanson calls for communities to envision where they would like to be within a hundred years and begin to learn to reach there, Parag Waknis' paper focuses on more immediate economic interventions that can address structural inequalities. Waknis argues that discriminatory structures such as caste and gender create the economic fault-lines that limit an individual's ability for upward mobility. During the pandemic, the highest levels of precarity and vulnerability could be traced along these fault-lines. To address these structural weaknesses, Waknis proposes a policy framework promoting inclusive economic institutions that provide all citizens with an equal chance to participate in the economy. He also recommends steps such as coupling the development of the financial sector with increased public spending through government borrowing, protecting vulnerable populations from aggregate or idiosyncratic shocks through short-term money transfers and the establishment of an urban

employment guarantee scheme. While these steps are aimed at creating a conducive policy environment for economic growth with justice, he acknowledges that their impact will be enduring only when the macroeconomic interventions are coupled with parallel efforts to uproot injustices in the social, cultural and political domains.

In his paper 'Labour Reforms and Economic Justice: Inequality, the COVID-19 Pandemic and Regionalism' Amitabh Kundu argues that addressing extreme inequalities would require not just the redistribution of wealth but also a transformation in the structure of the economy so that the processes of income generation become more equitable. A beginning in this direction would require a fundamental change in the relationship between labour and capital. Analysing recent legislations to reform labour laws within India, Kundu observes that while they provided some benefits to the unprivileged working classes in terms of access to social security, the overall effect has been to weaken labour unions and relax labour laws making it easier for industrialists and big employers to exploit their workers. Thus, attempts at reforming the system are undermined by the inherent logic of the system which perpetuates the exploitation of labour by capital.

Kundu cites data from the United Nations' Human Development Index to emphasise the structural causes that maintained high levels of inequality in countries such as India. He observes that while income inequality was high in countries across the development spectrum—from the highly developed to the least developed—inequalities in terms of access to health and education tended to be low in highly developed countries but very high in countries at the lower end of the spectrum. The impact of this is that those at the bottom of the income pyramid lack the enabling conditions of access to good healthcare and educational facilities to break out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

With its large population of young people, India has the advantage of a demographic dividend. Yet the creation of new jobs has not happened at the pace required to absorb this youth workforce. The years immediately preceding the pandemic saw high levels of unemployment which was drastically exacerbated during the first year of the pandemic with the unprecedented shrinking of the Indian economy resulting in massive job losses, especially within the informal sector. The paper by Panchanan Das and Swarup Roy titled 'Youth Unemployment, Education and Job Training: An Analysis of PLFS data in India' provides a granular picture of the impact of the pandemic on youth unemployment in India. They

analyse the impact in relation to various criteria including different age groups of youth, gender, rural or urban setting and levels of education. The policy relevance of their findings is evident. They found, for example, that the youth unemployment rate increased at a much higher rate in urban areas both for male and female youth during the initial phase of the pandemic. The likelihood of youth being unemployed is less for older youth than for younger ones. Their most telling observations relate to the relationship between education and employment among the youth in India. An inverse relationship is observed between the level of education and employment among young people—the unemployment rate is the highest among those with a Master's degree. This highlights the disconnect between the content of educational programs and the skills and capacities needed in the job market. They conclude that unemployment levels among young people, which are aggravated in times of crisis, can be reduced through policies addressing this mismatch between education and skills needed in the job market.

The stubborn, intersectional character of structural inequalities is brought out in Vibhuti Patel's paper on the impact of the pandemic on women's participation in the economy. She identifies the various barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the economy including the gender division of labour which requires women to shoulder the burden of unpaid domestic work; occupational segregation in the labour market; gender-blind development policies; regressive social norms and patriarchal attitudes. The challenges facing women only increased with the pandemic which led to large numbers of women dropping out of the work force.

Patel suggests that in the immediate future, the State must play a crucial role in redressing this injustice. In the absence of strong demand-driven growth in the market leading to the creation of new jobs, the State would have to make strategic interventions to create employment opportunities for women. It would also have to create social security programs, welfare schemes and basic infrastructure to relieve women from the burden and drudgery of care work and household management. Gender-sensitive policies on the basis of disaggregated data will have to be crafted to address women-centric issues. At a broader level, she calls for a rethinking of the dominant models of development that pursue economic growth and rise in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the panacea for all social problems. Such models have given rise to the rampant exploitation of the labour force, with women being among the most vulnerable. She ends her paper with the insight that beyond ensuring

greater participation for women in the existing economy which is beset with crises and injustices, the long-term challenge rests in building new economic structures that are not only more just and equitable but also more reflective of non-patriarchal values of care, collaboration and mutual assistance.

Another segment of the population gravely impacted by the pandemic are the Adivasis. Even prior to the pandemic, they were among the most disadvantaged groups in the country, ranking very low on almost all development indicators. Development policies across the decades have only exacerbated their displacement, alienation and destitution. H.S. Shylendra's paper titled 'Whither Adivasi Livelihoods? A Longitudinal Study of a Bhil Village in Gujarat' draws on an inter-temporal micro-level case study, carried out by him and his team in a tribal village of Gujarat over the course of two and a half decades from 1994 onwards, assessing the changes in living conditions and livelihoods of the villagers during this period. The study concludes that there has been little or no improvement during this time for the Adivasi villagers. Ironically, the study coincides with the liberalisation of the Indian economy, which was supposed to usher in 'a big tide that would lift all boats'. As the study found, far from achieving substantive improvements, the macroeconomic changes during this period only increased the vulnerability of the Adivasis to capitalist forces. Unable to rely on their traditional sources of livelihoods in forestry and agriculture, most of the inhabitants of the village under study, including women, were forced to rely on seasonal and circular migration to make ends meet. Most of the work available to them was of the unskilled or semi-skilled kind in the construction sector in urban areas which were highly exploitative, hazardous and degrading. Although many of them received some level of education and benefitted from various government welfare schemes, the improvements in their lives remained too superficial and meagre to allow them to resist or overcome the formidable forces that kept them in a state of deprivation. The paper makes a number of recommendations to reduce the vulnerability of the Adivasis, including increasing their local resource-base through water harvesting and forest land regeneration, the collectivisation of agriculture to increase their bargaining power, making available to them much-needed credit, and a special focus on increasing their access to quality education and skill development programs.

The issues facing the agrarian sector and the need for change have come into sharper focus in the aftermath of the pandemic. The return of

millions of migrants from cities to rural areas served as a stark reminder of the continued significance of agriculture in India's economy and polity. The attempt of the central government to pass the three ill-fated farm laws in 2020, the severe and protracted backlash that it provoked and the consequent decision to rescind these laws only served to bring the issues facing Indian farmers further into the spotlight of public attention. Harbir Singh Sidhu's paper 'Transforming India's Agrarian Society in a Post-COVID World: Prospects and Challenges' traces the imperatives that have shaped the trajectory of rural development in post-independence India. His analysis spans the totality of rural society including the social, cultural and political institutions and forces that constitute the matrix within which the rural economy functions. It also explores the possibilities of social, cultural and political change based on a perspective that attempts to reconcile the imperatives of social cohesion and justice with a practical reading of the ground realities in India's villages. The path towards change, as suggested by this paper, includes recommendations for reform in social, cultural and political structures and practices at the village level, and economic prescriptions such as increasing the marketability of agricultural produce in India and abroad and creating jobs in the manufacturing sector to absorb unskilled and semi-skilled workers displaced from the agricultural sector.

The pandemic's impact on food security, malnutrition and hunger has been one of its most disturbing effects resulting in great suffering for millions of the most vulnerable people in India and demanding urgent policy interventions. Dipa Sinha's paper analyses these issues in some depth. For the millions of people who were faced with the prospect of starvation due to the loss of livelihoods and increased expenditure on health, the free distribution of rations by the State through the Public Distribution System (PDS) was a life-saver. Sinha calls for access to the PDS to be universalised, at least in periods of crisis such as the pandemic, covering even those vulnerable populations who, for various reasons, lack access to the PDS. Further, she suggests decentralising the procurement of food for the PDS so as to source food items that are grown locally such as millets, pulses and edible oils. Such decentralised procurement can also be followed for the food provided through the Integrated Child Development Services and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. This approach would provide greater food and nutrition security and ensure that the producers of crops other than rice and wheat receive an assured price.

In her paper 'Degrowth, Diversity and Decentralization: Building Sustainable Food Systems for Food and Nutrition Security', Richa Kumar uses the context of the food crises caused by the pandemic to highlight the unsustainable nature of the modern agricultural system which has caused much damage to the natural environment and to human health. To build sustainable food systems and ensure food and nutrition security, Kumar argues that we focus on three 'D's: degrowth, diversity and decentralisation. In the present economic system, which focuses on increasing economic growth, food production and agriculture are considered economic activities that function outside of nature, whether in the form of material extraction or waste creation. The degrowth movement calls for the recognition that all economic activities, agriculture in particular, are embedded in nature and that there are ecological limits to how much an economy can grow. It calls for reducing the size of the material economy, redistributing resources more equitably and reprioritising the values of care, justice and environmental sustainability. In addition to degrowth, Kumar calls for a move away from standardised foods towards food diversity which characterised traditional diets that drew from a range of locally-sourced ingredients. However, moving towards degrowth and bringing back food diversity will not be possible without Kumar's third 'd' which is a process of decentralisation where capacity is built at the block and district levels to support framers, to help build local supply chains and to facilitate the creation of local markets.

By reviving the conversation around what we value as a society, Kumar feels that we can move away from the relationships of exploitation and extraction that characterise our existing food production and consumption systems. This would involve, among other things, changing how we measure success by bringing into the cost-output equation the impact food and agricultural systems have on the environment and on human well-being in its broadest sense.

The need for a reframing of the relationship between human beings and the natural world is the broad theme of three papers in this volume concerned with the challenges of water management and water governance in post-COVID India. In his paper titled 'Water Management Priorities in a Post-COVID World', P.S. Vijayshankar argues that the growing crisis of water scarcity cannot be addressed from within the development paradigm that has given rise to this problem. According to him, the extractive paradigm which prevails today views high rates of economic growth as the main goal to be pursued. The increasing

extraction of natural resources is seen as the means to achieve this goal. Approaches to water management that are based on this paradigm view water as a resource primarily meant for human consumption. In contrast, Vijayshankar proposes an ecosystem paradigm in which water is viewed as being embedded within the ecosystem as an inseparable part of it, to be protected and preserved for future generations. The principle that should guide humanity's relationship with water is that of 'water stewardship'.

Vijayshankar identifies five priority areas of action for water management in post-COVID India: the need to move away from water-intensive agriculture through the diversification of crops; sustainable and community-based management of ground-water; the protection of river systems and wetlands; ensuring of water quality and drinking water security; and the creation of strong legal frameworks for water governance in India.

In his paper 'Principles for Water Governance in a Post-COVID World: Water Sector Needs to be Embedded in Environmental Justice', K.J. Joy observes that the crisis in humanity's relationship with water revealed in rapidly-escalating demand and dangerously-depleting fresh-water and ground-water reserves is an outcome of the anthropocentric assumptions underlying our current development models. Drawing on principles from an environmental justice framework, Joy calls for a drastic restructuring of the water sector on more equitable, sustainable and democratic lines. Some of the guiding principles for water governance that he suggests include ensuring that interventions to water bodies are along the contours of nature and not artificially imposed; focus on the management of demand for water as against the present emphasis on supply augmentation; recognition of the structural and historical inequities which determine access to water; adoption of an approach to water management that is adaptive to rapidly changing circumstances and the promotion of participation of all peoples in water governance and in the processes of knowledge production.

The disruption caused by events such as the pandemic can provide a stimulus for a fundamental reassessment of the reading of reality on which policy-making is based. Vishal Narain's paper titled 'Seeing Water Differently' suggests that the pandemic offers just such an opportunity to alter narratives about crucial public policy issues. According to him, narratives play an important role in framing public policy and the kind of solutions proposed depend on narratives that shape our understanding of the problem. Based on this premise, Narain posits that the narrative around water governance needs to change from a mistaken focus on scarcity to

the issue of unequal access. He further elaborates on some of the implications of the distributional inequities faced on the basis of class, caste, gender and the rural-urban divide in India.

In light of this reading, Narain calls for greater sensitivity to existing forms of social, economic and political discrimination in the drafting of water policies. While analysing the social and political dimensions of water management, he stresses the need for interdisciplinarity in water resources education to prepare professionals in this field to approach water governance in all its complexity rather than from a purely technocratic perspective.

Among the vulnerable groups who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic were informal sector workers and those dwelling in urban informal settlements or slums. The remaining four papers of this volume focus on groups that belong to these segments. The paper by Puja Guha, Annapurna Neti and Roshni Lobo titled 'Reclaiming their Place in the City: Narratives of Street Food Vendors of Bengaluru during the COVID Crisis' sheds light on the plight of urban street food vendors. Their paper is based on a qualitative study carried out with food vendors in Bengaluru. It analyses how these vendors struggled to cope with the fallout of the pandemic. With the abrupt announcement of the lockdown in March 2020, which completely shut down city streets for an extended period, these vendors were cut off from their only source of livelihood. Many of them were migrants for whom the abrupt and prolonged loss of income left them with no option but to move back to their hometowns or villages or stay in the city and pile up unmanageable levels of debt. Even when the restrictions on mobility were eased and the streets became accessible, these vendors had to struggle to get back their customer base. A bigger challenge was to reclaim their physical space on the street which, during the prolonged lockdown, was appropriated for other purposes. Based on this study, the authors raise questions about the exclusionary nature of urbanisation which is reflected in the struggles of street food vendors for access to urban spaces and by their elusive quest for belongingness in the city.

Nomita Kumar and Kavita Baliyan focus on another segment of the urban informal sector—women domestic workers—in their paper titled 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Female Domestic Workers in an Urban Setting'. Among informal workers, women remain the most exploited and vulnerable. They are often not recognised as workers and

their contribution is often rendered invisible due to the intersection of gender and informality, making them doubly oppressed.

As described by Kumar and Baliyan, domestic work is mainly performed by women who migrate to cities from neighbouring villages or towns in search of livelihoods, often due to the absence of opportunities for remunerative work in rural areas and the need to repay debts. The pandemic and the consequent lockdowns dealt a devastating blow to the financial status of these women and their families, many of whom were pushed into a debt trap. In many cases, they were the primary earners of their families. Even after the lockdowns were relaxed, some of these women reported being stigmatised as the spreaders of the virus due to which they were prevented from returning to work or entering upper-class neighbourhoods.

Based on their interviews, Kumar and Baliyan observe that female domestic workers mostly opt for this line of work due to the large number of dependents in their households and the limited availability of income-generating opportunities. As their study reveals, many such women preferred domestic work to the other options of work available in the construction sector that were gruelling and degrading. Additionally, the domestic workers they interviewed gave various reasons for valuing this form of work—it helped them build strong relationships with their employers, it brought them respect in their communities and it gave them the opportunity to be outgoing and independent. The pandemic, thus, not only deprived them of their income but also of the positive social, emotional and mental support they derived from their work. These deprivations, in addition to the increased household duties they shouldered as women and the anxieties of contracting the virus, left many with mental health problems.

In the face of such an unprecedented crisis, the authors call for strong state support to this class of women in the form of greater social protection coverage, free food rations even for those without documents establishing their domicile, income support through cash transfers and gender-sensitive policies that address women-centric challenges. Furthermore, they point out that the right set of policies and legislative measures alone are not enough to secure the interests of women in the informal sector. Governments and employers can find loopholes to abdicate their responsibilities towards these vulnerable groups. The authors feel that there is also the need for genuine political will and a more profound social consciousness and commitment to social justice for all in society to

ensure that significant improvements in the living and working conditions of these vulnerable groups are achieved.

The next two papers in this volume focus on inhabitants of informal settlements, discussing not just the precarity of their lives aggravated by the pandemic but also their much-neglected capacities to serve as agents of change. In their paper 'Impacts of COVID-19 on Public Health in Urban Slums in India and Lessons for the Future', Siddharth Agarwal, Kanupriya Kothiwal, Shabnam Verma and Mayaram Sharma capture the tragic impact of the pandemic in terms of the disruption of routine and essential public health services to slum dwellers. The paper provides a glimpse of what this deprivation has meant for slum dwellers—pregnant mothers not receiving essential antenatal care and being deprived of medical attention even at the time of child birth; children missing out on essential immunisations and not receiving supplementary nutrition and medical attention during the crucial early years of their lives; cases of tuberculosis going undetected and untreated and women being unable to use birth control measures resulting in innumerable unwanted pregnancies. The cost of this massive lapse in healthcare provision in terms of the preventable deaths that occurred, and the irreparable damage dealt to the health and well-being of children and adults can never be fully estimated.

Drawing on a qualitative study carried out by the Urban Health Resource Centre in selected slums in Indore and Agra, their paper brings to light the veritable collapse of the system of healthcare for the vulnerable populations during the most intense phases of the pandemic. To build a more robust public health system in India to tackle future crises of this magnitude, the authors call for a significant increase in investment in the healthcare system to improve the quality of services and to expand its reach. In particular, they call for strengthening the health infrastructure in small cities, which have become the preferred destinations for rural migrants in search of livelihoods. They also argue that the increased resilience of the public health system in India will require reinforcing other crucial determinants of well-being such as food security, job opportunities and good education. This would call for coordination between various departments and agencies of the State and their active collaboration with the communities and the non-governmental organisations working at the grassroots.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for greater agency and involvement of the masses, especially urban migrants

dwelling in informal settlements, in their own development. Their participation however is predicated on how policy paradigms view them vis-à-vis knowledge. How valuable is what they know? How relevant is their perspective to shaping policies? Caroline Fazli's paper 'Whose Knowledge Makes a City Smart? Exploring Conceptions of the Role of Knowledge in Urban Policy in Indore, India' suggests that to truly value the learning and knowledge of the masses and to elicit their participation in development processes necessitates looking beyond conceptions that equate knowledge with information or technical expertise and being open to the way these populations generate and apply various forms of knowledge to achieve individual and collective well-being.

To understand the limitations of the way urban policies have viewed the poor, her paper uses historical institutionalism to gain insights into the way policy paradigms emerge on the basis of certain assumptions and beliefs. She uses this theoretical perspective to analyse the particular direction that urban policy took and draws on a recent study by the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development and the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity to propose that there is an epistemic gap which needs to be filled by taking into consideration people's own knowledge systems. This would require policy makers to broaden their conception of knowledge to include forms of knowledge generated outside scientific research institutions and those based on non-material ontological truth claims. In this expanded paradigm, it becomes possible to make visible how people resolve development issues through applying their own spiritual convictions, learning from them and passing on this learning to others thereby creating a culture based on these values.

Before ending, a word is in order about the proposition implicit in the title of this volume—that the pandemic must serve as the occasion for a much-needed reimagining of what prosperity is for India. Two questions arise from this proposition—what is the nature of the change being envisioned and who are the protagonists that will lead the country towards it? In response to the former, the volume proposes that the overarching goals of development must move beyond a narrow focus on economic growth and material prosperity and encompass a much broader conception of human well-being which includes the spiritual, social and cultural dimensions of life. Justice, the oneness of humankind and our interconnectedness with nature are after all ideas that resonate with people at the spiritual, social and cultural levels. Most people do not see themselves merely as utility maximising, self-interested economic actors. Rather,

while the material dimension of life has its importance, most people derive their deeper motivations and their sense of purpose from their spiritual convictions, their interpersonal relationships and their cultural values. This is especially so in a country such as India. Development plans and programs will be much more likely to elicit the wholehearted participation of the masses and summon their collective will for change when the prosperity for which they aspire combines the spiritual, social and material dimensions of life.

With regard to the second question, the pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the distinct contributions of the various protagonists in the development story of India at this moment in history. The State and its agencies create a conducive policy environment for change to occur through, for example, providing public goods such as health and education to all citizens that constitute the basic enablers of social and economic mobility. Furthermore, as the pandemic has shown, the State has to be the provider of the last resort. The pandemic also showed the enormous potential for rapid progress that is made possible when the private sector collaborates with the State in achieving common objectives. The development of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines within less than a year that saved millions of lives was a testament to the progress that can be achieved when business aligns itself with social goals. Protagonists from civil society such as community groups, social movements or non-governmental organisations play an indispensable role in mobilising the collective will for change. They incubate and test new ideas and provide prototypes of workable models to be implemented at regional and national scale. The various institutions of society such as the judiciary, religious institutions, the media, the education system and the family provide the necessary ecosystem within which the commitment to justice, to social harmony and to the preservation of the environment can be strengthened and nurtured. Through both formal and informal means, they act as promoters and regulators of normative values that can guide and constrain behaviour of the State, the private sector and the community. The picture remains incomplete without recognising the unique place of the moral agency of the individual in this scheme. The volition and initiative for change and the fire that sustains it come from a spark of the spirit that is born within the conscience of the individual. It is also through the active engagement of individuals that the moral integrity of a movement for change and its consistency over a long term

can be protected and preserved. It is thus through the mutually reinforcing collaboration between all the protagonists of the development process that the dynamics of a sound, steadily growing and sustainable process of social and economic change can be generated and sustained.

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