Towards a Conceptualization of 'Un-Ness' in 'Un-Lock' Phases: Riding from a Disaster to a Crisis

Abstract: That un-lock connotes, in no palpable ways, a post lock-down phase forms the chief content here. That two major attributes may be escalative, an engagement needs to be looked at afresh is also discussed. That un-ness has to have uniquely something on its own pertaining to the pressing requirement of the crisis is developed here. That the main tenor of un-locking is in no way related to erosion of the minimality of the lock-down phases is being focused here.

Key words: crisis dynamics, crisis context, un-lock, un-ness criticality, community network, crisis glossary

The ‘lock-down’ being eased and ‘un-lock’ being initiated by the ongoing pandemic Covid-19, that too being limited in Indian context, a quandary about usages of the verbiage ‘disaster’ vis-a-vis a corresponding term, ‘crisis’ appears to be prevailing nowadays. Obviously, the gravity of the situation cannot but be reckoned with. The Disaster Act of 2005 is being invoked to take care of the origin and subsequent stay-ons of the lock-down. The escalation of Covid-19 has, doubtless, unleashed concerns over pertinent issues, both locally and globally. Fundamentally speaking, public health continues to be a major issue that none of the declared phases can be hastily overseen. The telling tales of miseries on health grounds continue to proliferate. The 3 Cs - Contiguity, Contaguity and Contextuality - deserve to be exhorted on an ongoing basis. A continually disturbing feature exists around the wherewithal of the virus and about its dynamic whereabouts. That being not well-contended with till now, an insipient ‘un-ness’ seems to be flourishing. That’s all the more needed to go in for a kind of correspondence allowing a transfer from a ‘disaster’ to a ‘crisis’. The range and the domain thereof are to be sought for, not from earlier forms, but from new acquisitions in both lock- and un-lock- in periods.

The foregoing remarks provide the backdrop of what has kept on happening certainly in the global arena and in local ambits of India, as well. Let us now go in for culling in some of the inklings of Covid-19 crisis, not being wholly within the explicit purview of the Indian Disaster Act, 2005. It is being increasingly realized that the prevailing crisis has brought to the fore the vulnerability of the Indian populace, leading to a disruption in socio-economic activities. Here is the vulnerability having its roots somewhere in smaller zones of socio-economic units, discernable in almost all sectors of the wider ambiences per se. One can put in a fairly sizeable amount of data in the agricultural sector, for example, where a crisis is found to be overwhelmingly devastating. The corona crisis has kept on acquiring and putting up fresh outrages in the Indian context that may well provide an enabler to grapple with contending issues plus the entrepreneurship for developing a future roadmap. Crisis can, thus, provide an opportunity to move on quickly in relatively stable socio-economic regimes. It is true that the global scenario is in many ways variegated and hence, that might well demand an Indian endeavour to carve out novel ways. One cannot be skeptic about initial healthcare as a snowball to the economic crisis. The social stigma of Covid-19 infection is often found to be exacting a fear psychosis, if not paranoia, and so, a greater necessity than earlier for deciphering the demarcation between lock-down and un-lock regimes.

A robustness of the health care system becomes imperatively called for. A correlation between the global pandemic and climate change cannot be precluded at different levels, and more so in the Commonwealth climate zones where one does aim at zero carbon emission. This does bring in the bulky complexion of climate expenditure attuned to climate adaptation and strategy. A multiple approach becomes then a necessity in fighting back the crisis so as to allow the global commonality to emerge. One can confront the crisis if there be somewhat a global re-structuring, as Covid-19 appears to be expediting the existing fissures in the global system.
One can have an interim summing-up in that a pandemic is found to affect somewhat unequally the people, but the virus keeps on exploiting the physiological and social vulnerabilities. The diseases bring to the fore structural divisions in as much as the same in regard to the levels of perception. Therefore, in the totality of the system, there has to be a potential core that requires to be fathomed and controlled. There are disaster sociologists who may provide new dimensions to such perceptions. But there is every possibility of the development of a formidable dynamics, if the disease in one way or the other becomes justifiably temporal. That should call for solidarity in a crisis, like the pandemic Covid, or even the cyclone ‘Amphan’, as a sort of natural response. For instance, Kerala, a state in India, has firmly put on hold ab initio the emerging crisis. South Korea has immensely benefited because of its attuning the logistics to the pandemic scenarios.

Any state-the-art now, in regard to disaster and/or crisis followed by lock-down and un-locked phases, has to labour under a sort of ‘between-ness’. Even though a participant may wonder about what are at stakes, there is a tendency to look around the moorings, if any. The onlooker may become incapable of coming to terms with the situation. The crisis appears to be removable with or without some external stimuli so that hovering around few feeble strategizing peaks becomes ticklish. How does one then make a distinction between a ‘non-’ and ‘un-’ness? Does the ‘between-ness’ then raise the question on inequalities? Which one should proceed ahead or follow on? The complexities then have to live with complexions that the crisis may keep on acquiring. The routes thereof keep on wandering so as to disallow any shred of either complexity or inequality. Using a figure of speech, one may liken the situation to one of ringing the bell of a bathos. The distancing becomes all the more to be worried about, far from being put up ritualistically. The ‘social distancing’ could thereby unfold itself more discernibly than what may occur through mechanical prescriptions. How should then one take care of these much-talked about waves following the initial spikes? Do these foreshadow the succession of wavelets, if any?

The above lines provide broad indicators that may well follow through successions or recessions of lock-down and ancillary processes. There is every likelihood that one may seek alignments with some naïve skills. A state of preparedness has to be reckoned with when the instantaneity of the time-response is considered. It follows that in pre-empting exercise on an ongoing crisis one cannot set recourse to practices without being equipped earlier. Yet, the variations in un-ness with regard to a crisis or disaster seldom come up separately. Assuming the course of happenings to be inconsolably discontinuous and often confrontably zig-zag, one may have to strategize capably, as dictated by ground realities. The latter happens to be a conglomerate of un-ness(ess) without being wholly exhaustive. If the un-ness becomes splittable into self-contained units, one can possibly apply the well known canons of ‘reductionism’. Therefore, there is a need now for a different approach in the wider context of diversity of un-ness relating to a crisis or a disaster. Any transitional exercise may take care of variations of un-ness through coarse juxtapositions. Yet the ultimate goal should be to have the format of an integrated structure. Any structuralization thereof has to be initiated on the basis of an assumption so that it does not reflect any shred of arbitrariness in the system. The usual consideration of losses and damages which often escalate, may turn out to be of use in conceptualizing what may be described as the ‘core sector’. As is fairly well known, any emerging response hopefully for a short period, prior to/ during/after disaster impact, cannot but reckon with disruptions and losses. A phase-wise delineation of the curb with spatial and temporal dimensions, has to identify few limited phases.

The present happenings on the pandemic can be described as either ‘direct secondary’ or ‘disaster-induced’ with indirect impacts. The contours of the disaster event, involving a series of zones, have a common centre as the site of severe impacts surrounded by gun spots. One finds this in the Indian arena in Mumbai or parts of Chennai. It still remains an arduous exercise where the range of negative impacts can be identified because of there being often, an escalation of happenings. Can we think of this as an excess demand, somewhat unexpected? Can then one argue about unanticipated demands exceeding the capabilities of the realm(s) to respond? Any routinized response can hardly be of use as coping measures and so, the need of a structural view as mentioned earlier. A combination of physical features along with biological insecurities requires identification of conceptual characteristics of the crisis nowadays. One may look upon them as dilemmas from administrative points of view. But one cannot shrug off the view of a practitioner conceptualizing the crisis per se.

It must have been clear by now that the term ‘crisis’ remains almost an undefined term unless we mean it, so as to be decided upon. This provides attributes through which a crisis can be looked upon as a disruption, which
not only impacts the system holistically but may put its constituents in jeopardy. Of course, that assumes the existence of an element of threat to the system. The disruption is often found to be un-scheduled, un-expected, un-planned, un-pleasant, often unimaginable and un-manageable and so, one can conceptualize a halo of un-ness as described by Hewitt\(^1\). One can then endow crises with a multiplicity of realities. A crisis reality is far from being homogeneous and, therefore, one should explore in it the diversity of the reality. Crisis may come up as a rapid-onset, self-evident and acute, but that can also be a slow-onset, creeping, emerging and ambivalent. Hence, one of the rudiments in the un-ness turns out to be an uncertainty. But, in disaster contexts, one cannot afford to be ambiguous. In its initial phase, there should necessarily be exercises on shelter and rescue from the place of occurrence of the event. Can’t we, therefore, venture for isolating the crisis or cordonning off, as a no-go area? Once the isolation of crisis is realized, one can reduce misinformation that often increases the degree of uncertainty. Hence, one finds a genre of isolation related in one way or the other to distancing, as is often talked about nowadays in regard to a lockdown. For the communities involved, an uncertainty can well acquire a collective dimension leading to a stressed context. The urgency implicit in a crisis, does not need any re-iteration. But if it is synonymous with an emergency, then an intervention becomes a necessity within limited temporal entities, so that the sheer existence of the affected community may not be in danger.

As is being observed in different parts of India, if not in other countries, it is the lack of urgency that makes communities to be preyed upon by a dreadful syndrome. Therefore, in order to grapple with the crisis, an isolationist view does not suffice; rather a continual process has to be resorted to, as a determining whip. If we assume the processual characteristics of the crisis, both in retrospect and prospect, its dynamics needs to be monitored so that the complexity of the system does in no way take a backseat. Lexicon-wise, one cannot afford to miss the root meaning of the word ‘crisis’, rapid or slow. Expectedly, trajectories endowed with nonlinearities keep on evolving themselves.

In an earlier context, the term ‘between-ness’ occurs, without the ‘order’ being considered as an essential attribute. But the pre-requisites of post crisis happenings should be the appropriation of the modes of crisis. Once this is agreed to, the word ‘un-know ledge-ness’ pertaining to the crisis has to be prioritized. This usage does not necessarily mean to imply either de-escalation or disengagement with the fall-outs of the crisis. A knowledge-wise repository becomes then a necessity. Knowledge relationships are shareable elements among the people forming networks on crisis related activities. Several ways of interactions can well accrue immediate and long term benefits. If the crisis is to be handled on knowledge-based principles, one has to make use of the community networks, expectedly complementing the existing framework and facilitating knowledge-sharing structure, acquisition and resilience. Therefore, a community can well aspire to have a centrality, replicable in many ways elsewhere. A centre may well facilitate contacts within and outside the affected communities, promote interactions on field experiences and may come out with a crisis-wise calendar for affected members of the community and others as well and so, can well develop a glossary on crisis.

Any wrap-up now has to reckon with an initialization of the disaster. The elements of un-ness, as pleaded for in the above lines, does give rise to a looming crisis, handling which requires a perception of the carving out of its pathways. The un-ness as figured out by Hewitt\(^1\) could translate a disaster into a crisis, that has been later dealt with for limited purposes by Sinha\(^4\). That there can be an erosion of readiness to cope with the crisis should be a compelling indicator. That may still-in the self as requirement of the current lockdown period. A full bloom crisis may not be readily visible and not so the associated risk. This can well unfold a complex roadmap because of the incursions of Covid-19. That it is a variegated coupling has been well taken care of in current context by Zakaria\(^5\) and Wallace-wells\(^6\).

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