

# Understanding Covid-19 Pandemic: A Cultural Study to decode the process of Intellectualization

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## Abstract:

*Amid such pandemic, this paper will try to analyze what is exactly going on, while media covers covid news, statistics elaborate the pandemic across countries, how global economic condition is suffering due to worldwide lockdown of production and consumption and finally how national political figures including portfolios are coming up with decisions, some of which are effective and some are largely being criticized. These are common areas of such a huge Covid-19 portfolio around the world having special reference to India for the common people as they belong to this country as a citizen. The Covid-19 pandemic is chiefly deluged with the heavy tides of extremely manipulated information much more than the research-based outcomes at such a dimension that common people across countries or nations are facing enough to be perplexed at any point of time and space. Series of webinars across disciplines are subsequently being organized to discuss the effect of pandemic, managing the impact, as stated by leading institutions, remedial measures as proposed by concerned institutions etc. Very few however talk about the politics of such manipulated information that lead the road of experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic. The ways nodal institutions are handling the situation are further being repeatedly discussed in these webinars. Cross-statements of these nodal institutions on the other hand have however been a common phenomenon in these days. The motives are commonly promotional in favour of the establishment. Deaths are increasing day by day, so is the number of affected in this unlock-II period in the country. The government in the name of initiating social measures is trying utmost to start up and develop a stereotypical mode of living during the lockdown and nowadays a futile unlock phases. In this way a new form of enlightenment, popularly defined as 'new normal', has already been evolved which pushes up a new modernity of control in the country. The common least focused multitudes are unconsciously playing a role of hefty observers but largely least understood on what is happening for last three-four months.*

**Keywords:** pandemic, unconscious, information, Baudrillard, modernity, ideological, China, India, Covid-19, metanarrative, democratic, signifier, signified, production, jouissance, imaginary, simulation.

## 1. Prologue: Ideological-New and Democratic-New:

Some years back I got a book bearing a bizarre name “*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*” (1991) written by none other than French Poststructuralist Jean Baudrillard. Before I come to relate that to this subject let me share another experience I witnessed in an interview where an expert almost scolded me for referring Baudrillard although NOT that book.

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While referring to that book almost untimely he said that when such a destruction of Gulf War tolled millions of lives, Baudrillard made such an imaginary outline. I could not reveal anything before they rejected me on such a cause which I didn't perpetrate that in the first paragraph of that so called book Baudrillard extended a description about the massive destruction of wealth and human lives.

The pandemic of Covid-19 has rejuvenated that memory suddenly when we all have been observing for months the collision rather a 'pandemic of cross-arguments' is overshadowing every bit of the actuality of suffering from Covid-19. What we have observed, as a preamble of this paper, in these days? We have witnessed a trail of binary informative sources arguing on many related issues of the pandemic trying to establish both a '*new ideological war*' and a newly '*make-over look of democratic placement of oppositional arguments*'.

**Metanarrative:** *is such a construction of thought and language that controls and mostly suppresses other scientific, research-based and common narratives. It works as a symbol of power that reaches people as a ruling.*

**Undecidable:** *is a construction of thought and language used by Jean Baudrillard to establish the occurrence of such a thought/speech/order which is very uncertain in nature but somehow removes uncertainty of common people. Common people "unreasonably" believe it in the name of support or pulling local power.*

**Semio-linguistic:** *is a tool/branch of cultural study that covers semantic importance of socially developed linguistic structures influencing social culture deeply.*

### 1.1 Ideological-New:

The ideological war has been organized to such a degree where-

- a) As per news reports, the US has apparently ended all relationship with WHO, for allegedly posing an inclined stance toward China;
- b) US has also posed a potential threatening to India for such a medicine which was and is still not confirmed as a preventive medicine by any research of any institutional dimension;
- c) US has unequivocally held China responsible for Covid-19 spreading. Till date the US media has reported about the Wuhan lab and P-4 controversy, where US had a huge amount of investment for viral research;
- d) Indian Prime Minister repeatedly wants his countrymen to pose certain ideologically symbolic activities to somehow consummate the nation's activities. From beating the plates, lighting candles to floral showering on hospitals from the army choppers expending

crores of rupees, all have been accomplished to somehow measure a summative of nationalism;

- e) A typical ideological divide has been in trial for last three-four months between China and the rest US and some allied countries' ideological grouping;
- f) WHO being in a precarious condition after the US assistance withdrawn, has been changing its statements on various issues like source and character of the virus, spreading criteria, proper medication, and finally vaccines;
- g) Some very basic confusions are popping up about the nature of hydroxychloroquine or some other very common drugs to be used or not. In this way people are being confined in basic dialogues behind which a massive research is reportedly going on;
- h) India has already taken a nationalist decision to convince its people rejecting and banning Chinese commodities specially commodities of virtual operations i.e. various Chinese Apps;
- i) Two new symbolic signified(s) have been created with new emotive elements for further commercial use:
- j) Doctors and health workers as the most symbolic signified(s); (ii) Army or Armed forces are being projected as another most wanted signified. Several advertisements, advertorials have already been produced to influence public sentiments as synonymous and components of nationalism.

### **1.2 Democratic Make-over:**

Now the new democratic make-over scenes are quite unprecedented and looking subsequent to the ideological-new in the contemporary lives of billions; such as,

- a) Nation-wide lockdown of lives has halted the real face of democracy;
- b) Although Doctors' and Scientists' opinions are being formally considered quintessential, the decision for lockdown normal lives has popped up a large amount of debates chiefly on whether lockdown can at all break the chain;
- c) As we all have observed that lockdown has led to create such a degree of unemployment in many countries including India;
- d) A global ideological divide has led to a gross democratic makeover when amid so much social and financial crises Indo-China conflict on border issue, has popped up to suppress many other issues like selling coal mines etc.

- e) The total administrative, social, political, institutional operations are being both paradigmatically transposed to online operation for which the global virtual monopolistic institutions are nowadays in operation, although some amount of indigenous or alternative operations too are incomparably seen accordingly. Based chiefly upon online or virtual operations, a new symbolic expression has been coined 'New Normal';
- f) The overall pandemic emergency and the trail of narratives or signified(s) have already made the country largely monolithic where government operation becomes more formal and legitimized to be overshadowing all earlier democratic norms.

The above two 'ideological-new' and 'democratic-new' conditions grossly rule and regulate the whole Covid-pandemic situation such a superlative degree that dangles a carrot of clear metanarrative "This is how Covid-19 is affecting the country and the world". This is equally problematic as what French Poststructuralist Jean Baudrillard had once written – The Gulf War Didn't Take Place" observing the destruction of the gulf war in 1991.

## 2. Not that How the Pandemic Projected :

In his book 'The Gulf War did not Take Place' Baudrillard argues that "*what took place was not a war, not that nothing took place*"<sup>[1]</sup>. Despite the argument looks bizarrely difficult among believers of global informatics and propaganda manufactured for the pandemic situation, let us consider it in a bit detailed manner. Baudrillard argued that what has taken place in the gulf was not a war, probably more than a war. It is however not that nothing happened. Similarly with the above two present conditions the question becomes too pertinent, what happened really in Covid-19 paradigm. Right from the so far the origin of Corona epidemic estimated or conjectured in Wuhan city of China, the country beyond any research or all truths became the source of virus, and the rumours started swelling much speedier than the virus that as per Donald Trump's claim, 'Covid-19 originated in Chinese Laboratory'. What comes actually interesting is the production of such metanarratives: China created the virus with a bushy tail of many other story-telling statements; i.e. myths.

BBC however clearly covers that '*US President Donald Trump has appeared to undercut his own intelligence agencies by suggesting he has seen evidence coronavirus originated in a Chinese laboratory. Earlier the US national intelligence director's office said it was still investigating how the virus began. But the office said it had determined Covid-19 "was not manmade or genetically modified". China has rejected the lab theory and criticised the US response to Covid-19. Since emerging in China last year, the virus has killed 230,000 people worldwide including*

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<sup>1</sup> Baudrillard, Jean: *The Gulf War did not Take Place*; Indiana University Press, 1991.

63,000 in the US. The pandemic has seen at least 3.2 million people infected, a million of them Americans, since the virus spread from the city of Wuhan'.<sup>[2]</sup>

China also on the other hand leaves no stone unturned to establish itself as superpower by polarizing the global scenario in its favour. This kind of polarizing condition is however easily evident in the pandemic scenario in other big countries. From total Lockdown to the contemporary new education policy was announced by the Prime Minister as reported within a few days thus showing the manufacturing potential of the central intellectualization system. Indian people have already experienced the double-folded magnitude and impact of such metanarratives of central intellectualization system for last three four months in so many facets like, sudden loss of jobs, dilution of job security, selling of coal fields and railway route to the private entrepreneurs etc. Another fold of the central intellectualization system is the 'undecidable' prognosis (metanarratives) of country's bright future.

The pandemic, as therefore projected, is full of such semio-linguistic narratives which become eternally difficult for common people, despite having some idea of nationalistic politics, to get hold of such a subtly tricky use of structures. The virtuality of such linguistic structures has been so subtle that even knowing the basic trick being played by the authority no one can evade the brutal politics of such metanarratives and signified(s) as people and common intellectuality basically overlook the virtuality of signifiers. So even identifying the authority perpetrating such problems an openly hidden mentality finally justifies everything to a large chunk of mass. Common political binarity starts creating counter-metanarratives like counter slogan but soon getting absorbed into the linguistic virtuality. All misstatements of nodal authorities about appropriate medicines, source country, whether lab-made virus, whether it is air-borne or contaminates just through droplets, but finding almost exact number of globally affected cases and death-toll are those signified(s) that after being communicated becomes a heavy-use of publics transcending the 'ideological-new'. All these signified(s) therefore give a huge mileage to the owner of the means i.e. signifier i.e. the central metanarrative, i.e. concerned authorities.

### **3. Undecidable- A Centrally Produced Pandemic Speculation:**

As argued earlier, the whole gamut of signified(s) draws up a holistic figure of pandemic which creates a belief system new in its form but old by its characteristics. Referring Baudrillard to this context further, "*The war is also pure and speculative, to the extent that we do not see the real event that it could be or that it would signify...the entire world including the military is caught*

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<sup>2</sup> BBC: *Coronavirus: Trump stands by China lab origin theory for virus*; 1st May, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52496098>

*up in a process of intellectualization...the undecidable...the use of a word-processor renders futile and impossible the passage to the act of writing, because it removes from it in advance any dramatic uncertainty...war turned into information becomes a symptom*"<sup>[3]</sup>. Doesn't this statement feasibly resemble the present Covid-19 pandemic? The present pandemic even beyond all contours of any war provides rather produces a total system of speculation in which, people do not see even a bit of actuality of the real event in this great lockdown which can signify at least the event. The total population including the workforce supposes to believe in such a system which extracts their intellectuality to legitimize the speculation. There is no doubt that brutality or banality of pandemic actuality occurs behind such speculation. But this overhauling speculation creates such a social disorder across localities that people in various cases do not even get medical support for any other ailment. People in many cases are now getting counter-speculatively prepared to 'die' without proper treatment in such a pandemic situation, even not being corona-affected. The legitimization goes up to the extent of welcoming death but somehow suppressed by this gigantic speculation system. The whole pandemic speculation system has therefore created an 'undecidable' reality in social media and almost everywhere in public sphere contacts.

The undecidable is everywhere at every point of intellectualization, but it removes uncertainty about the issue to make it a symptomatic information structure. The number of information appeared as symptoms of pandemic comes in such a big figure which even supersedes the mundane estimate of millions of tweet a day, millions of video-views a day, millions of unread messages forwarded etc. This displacement is as 'undecidable' as a form of reality, so becomes such a form that individuals fill it with all they have to understand the pandemic which, in Baudrillard's language, *"the principle of simulation which governs all information and the structural unreality of images"*<sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **4. Intellectualization produces "Undecidable(s)":**

What is left there in common hands is the so called intellectuality on undecidable(s) in both public and private spheres and specially in social media in this lockdown period. What are these undecidables? (a) Intellectualizing the war; (b) military caught up in intellectualization (c) Vaccine release on a pre-determined date; (d) Leaving global nodal bodies; (e) Banning consumption of Chinese commodities; (f) Whose intellectualization? (g) Whose space? (h) Government's package of financial 'undecidables' (i) Does statistics give us actual scenario?

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<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard, Jean: *The Gulf War did not Take Place*; Indiana University Press, 1991, pp-34-41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Why these are undecidables? These are such structures produced as signifiers to communicate an individualistic story of both global and local signified e.g. Covid-19 pandemic. These are therefore nothing but typically made linguistic structures which Baudrillard defined 'undecidable' just a processing of words but rules every bit of any subject. This is shallow but top layered intellectualism that rules firstly the lower undecidables in mass spheres and secondly implant itself among larger mass. Only intellectualizing on these can create a simulating ambience.

#### **4.1 Intellectualizing the War or Wartime:**

Surrounding the pandemic situation from its initial days since January of this year and even before that, a belligerent condition at the Indian border rather LOC or LAC (Line of Actual Control) with Pakistan and China is evident which otherwise has also been frequently disturbing in the long past, be it Kashmir, or insurgency activities, Doklam, Arunachal wherever. But this pandemic has put a special intellectualization on these issues when Chinese infiltration is suddenly being seen which has disturbed that particular point. The holistic structure of intellectualization appears very bizarre when the ruling government is mobilizing its statements from two of its official poles – administrative, and political. The oscillation of the government from administrative to political has been so subtle that always remains difficult to decode. The so called intellectualism on 'undecidable' code on many such related issues have been equally attractive to political opposition having aptitude to assume power. The empty code vessel is being filled up with other streams of intellectualities that make war like myths.

Not only that the army officials are even caught up intellectualizing the war by creating certain war preparatory statements which appear a clear 'undecidable' to the common innocent mass for firstly to create and then remove the central uncertainty whether my country is prepared.

#### **4.3 Vaccine on a Pre-determined date :**

Instead of getting involved into whether scientifically it is feasible, as Scientists or Doctors have already addressed the issue and the nodal ICMR has also issued necessary statements that it is not possible, the so called intellectualism on this issue has created some symbolic undecidables about the vaccine that also worked as a removal of uncertainty on this issue in public mind. Scientists of ICMR however assured that there is no chance of getting the vaccine in Indian markets within an 'undecidable' but symbolic 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. ICMR has however issued a further notification on a fast-track process to prepare the vaccine to avoid any red-tape delay. But the undecidables produced already reach much faster than any subsequent government notification or order or related news. Both are traversing the same virtual mediational path to reach the audience, whichever is faster. Corrigendum or rectification of any such notification is just a conjecture that it would wash out the earlier message from audience mind. Two layers of

conjecture work here. Firstly, the message already traversed the path; secondly, the signifier of the message. Expecting a corrigendum in common people's mind is the first degree of imagination and hoping the signifier to be withered is a bigger form of imagination.

#### **4.4 Leaving Global Nodal Bodies:**

Leaving WHO on the one hand for WHO's confusing statements on an 'undecidable' political diplomatic ground allegedly supporting China, has gone to many people as a surprise. In the present corona pandemic the production of undecidables is visibly evident such as, threatening India and other countries for such a medicine (Hydroxychloroquine) which already has been riddled with so much cross statements by the top level of both medicine and political experts. WHO also stated to media two binary opposite statements about that medicine successively in few days gap. India also complied with the US threatening immediately and sent medicines overtly on compassionate ground and covertly perhaps on the present cross-border issue to create a broader alliance or for a seat in Security Council. The 'undecidable' has removed all uncertainty when a real cross-border issue occurred at Galwan in Leh region and this time India has taken a very patriotic step to move very close to the war.

#### **4.5 Banning Consumption of Chinese Commodities:**

The government of India in such a situation, as argued earlier, has issued a 'nationalist' directive to ban all Chinese apps on the ground of protecting country's data from Chinese hackers or these apps. This is probably a perfect example of an 'undecidable' removing uncertainty among public about the signifier of the order. But it utterly confuses the counter-intellectualizing force comprising scientists and other software experts concerned that how it is going to be possible. When a person in his/her mobile allows 'software' of 'app' to use the mobile all mobile data at that moment remains open. Secondly, there are some brands of any product that originates from China, but there is other plenty of products which are produced from factories located in China. Both are therefore produced and coming from China. This is point where ideological-new is required to create an "undecidable" which beyond all uncertainties will remove that in larger public's mind.

Moreover after promoting a massive stream of consumption oriented economy or economic boost and subsequently a consumerist society, a new patriotic nationalistic mode of consumption may become a good 'undecidable' but that needs a parallel, globally huge production potential which at least has never been there at that point of condition since the start of globalization, it would not otherwise have opened up its economy to largely an import oriented globalization. Two kinds of import we may locate here: (i) foreign brands; (ii) foreign investment: in which Reliance has recently announced 12 foreign investments, including Google have already pumped up JIO brand. *"In total Ambani has now sold a total of 25.09% stake in JIO*



to 11 foreign investors amounting to a total of Rs. 1,17,588.45 crore”<sup>[5]</sup>. Moreover Indian premiers have often been found travelling foreign countries to attract both investments and brands to come to India. In such a situation, the “Atmanirbhar” has become a real ‘undecidable’ in a consumerist society

#### 4.6 Whose Intellectualization and whose Space?

Another French Poststructuralist Jacques Lacan argued, while defining whose act, or whose signifier, the presence of key person whose desire becomes the act of others<sup>[6]</sup>. He creates the subject for others, so he creates ‘other’. Very significantly he argued that for ‘psychotic’ the signifier is imaginary but for others it is real. One can exactly say for what it remains imaginary and for whom it comes as real. The actuality of the subject, here as the pandemic, therefore becomes detached from both imaginary and the symbolic act, whatever is desired. In this way the both nationally and globally the pandemic is detached from the imaginary and symbolic acts like leaving WHO, threatening a country for medicine, directing people for various bizarre performative actions, imaginary of patriotism and most importantly imaginary of nationalism. Lacan defined this phenomenon and “Jouissance”. “Jouissance” needs a command. We don’t need to stretch it further as readers have already understood it. Here ‘imaginary’ therefore stands as ‘undecidable’. Almost all such webinars subjecting Covid-19 are organizing the “Jouissance” of all larger commands, statements etc.

#### 4.8 Government’s Package of Financial Undecidables:

As we all know that the government of India has finally come out with a package of Rs. 20 Lakh-Crores (10% of the total GDP, as announced by the PM) to manage the economic situation. The package so far heard from the Finance Minister has been a great adjustment of various previous financial allocations. The adjustment was such a linguistic or semiotic in nature that in some cases the language of the policy uttered by Finance Minister does not even hit the fund allotment. The liquidity boosting measure and lowering interest rates of RBI having measured in an expected amount has been included in the package. The analysis of Tanvee Gupta Jain, Economist at UBS Securities India looks very interesting here in this context, “*However, looking at the breakdown, the liquidity support and credit guarantee measures accounted for nearly three-fourths of the economic support package, followed by monetary measures at 15% and fiscal support at only 10%. The upfront direct fiscal cost this year from the Covid-19 support package announced so far is quite limited (1.2% of GDP)*”<sup>[7]</sup>. The version of another leading

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.businessinsider.in/business/news/reliance-closes-deal-with-4-investors-gets-rs-30062-cr/articleshow/76904650.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://www.businessinsider.in/business/news/reliance-closes-deal-with-4-investors-gets-rs-30062-cr/articleshow/76904650.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>6</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *What does Lacan say about the Signifier?* In [www.lacanonline.com](http://www.lacanonline.com)

<sup>7</sup> *Economic stimulus package | Details of ₹20-lakh-crore package announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in five tranches;* MAY 17, 2020 15:14 IST. [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)

capital market company CLSA stated appears almost same, “We calculate that of the final economic package of Rs 20.97 lakh crore, only 8.4% or Rs 1.77 lakh crore, to hit the FY21 fiscal deficit, that is, only 0.8% of GDP. Notably, new announcements over the past five days make up 42% of this hit or 0.34% of GDP, and the remaining 58% comes from old measures which were known from before”<sup>[8]</sup>. If these are coming from capital market companies, one can imagine the magnitude of “undecidable” produced by the central imagining authority to remove the confusion in public psyche over the disastrous actuality. Apart from the announcement of free ration up to November to common mass, the retail market inflation is soaring high over 6.9 in the month of June 2020.

#### **4.9. Imaginary Undecidables Detach the Largest Labour Force:**

The experience of pandemic, economic, and political does not therefore match together. Creating imaginary undecidables have become so counter-productive for the larger society that political leaders, social activists, even thinkers could not expect the sudden upsurge of the country’s own labour-force when they started coming out at an unprecedented crises of their survival. The total number labour force outraged, trudging, confined in the lockdown period has exactly been what undecidables detached them. Baudrillard was right about saying it only a word-processor. The detachment therefore has further been certified when media visuals have been considered for a national counter definition. The ‘undecidable’ has defined them ‘Migrant’ as they work outside of their own states and secondly they were trudging back to their places. The second factor becomes more plausible than the first because the nation knew at least that many people work in other states obviously before lockdown. Although created by the central ‘undecidable’ but it was however accepted by all. It was somehow like at least an adjective is there to identify them. Firstly the pandemic and then the social disaster of such a degree suppressed the actuality in people’s mind. The situation is such sterilizing that the actuality instead of being represented by the definition is being suppressed by that.

#### **5. Common People caught up in Interplay:**

After the labour force, time has nearly arrived when common people with the massive spreading of the pandemic, feel the detachment from establishment and facing untimely death being either corona affected or suffering from other ailments, and sitting unemployed. In such an intriguing situation the production of ‘undecidables’ continues to apparently remove all beast-shaped confusions to establish a feel good orientation that ‘everything is under control’. The common people are caught up in the interplay of the power and the large-scale production of ‘undecidables’ from its fake intellectualization business. The intellectualization business

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

being very attractive in two basic aspects- (a) Its social media form; and (b) cheap intellectualization technique;

## 6. Conclusion :

To conclude, it is better to do with Baudrillard's initial pages, "Everything is therefore transposed into the virtual, and we are confronted with a virtual apocalypse, a hegemony ultimately much more dangerous than real apocalypse...We are no longer in a logic of the passage from virtual to actual but in a hyperrealist logic of the deterrence of the real by the virtual...we have created a gigantic apparatus of simulation...We prefer the exile of the virtual, of which television is the universal mirror to the catastrophe of the real"<sup>[9]</sup>. Television during the first gulf war in 1991 was instrumentalized as a virtual weapon of the US-UK combined authority and corporate media when national television like Doordarshan was directed to telecast CNN package of gulf war scenes everyday in the evening. Intellectualization then was the master technique of either global imperialist forces or national authority. Nowadays in the Covid-19 pandemic the whole system has been transposed into the virtual, where 'tweets' and other social media posts have become a master instrument of authority and so the common people's too. In this way the relationship of the leaders and common mass are being managed by producing 'undecidables'. Authority's intellectualization and mass's counter intellectualization have somehow become the present dialectical truth. Everything actual otherwise has been alienated from the transposed system. The evidences are very clear in India, where financial and social realities are going to show a major debacle in near future.

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<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard, Jean: *The Gulf War did not Take Place*; Indiana University Press, 1991.pp-27-8.