

Path to a World State: COVID 19 and the Seeds of Anarchism

Punsara Amarasinghe

Sanjay Rajhans

Posted to the World Orders Forum: 5 June 2020

Punsara Amarasinghe is a visiting fellow at the Center for Global Legal Studies at the University of Wisconsin Madison and he reads for a PhD in International Law at the Institute of Law and Politics in Scuola Superiore Sant Anna in Pisa, Italy. He previously held a one-year research fellowship at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow.

Sanjay Rajhans is the Deputy Chair of Department of Public Policy at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and currently he is a visiting professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Turin in Italy.

It is by no means a hyperbolic phrase to call the year 2020 as “*Anus Horribilis*” by virtue of the events that have befallen from the very first month. The new year bells rang amid the bush fires in Australia, and seventy-two hours after New Year’s Eve the US assassinated Iranian top General Soleimani in Iraq, creating an extremely tense situation. Then within a week, the greater disturbance escalated into a worse scenario when Iran launched an attack on the US bases in Iraq.

However, all the above-mentioned events became less significant and probably forgotten when COVID 19 became an unmitigated disaster, creating chaos around the world. When it emerged in China at the end of 2019 the morbid fascination shown by the US foreign policy analysts was a palpable factor as the US perceived that repercussions of COVID 19 in Wuhan may inevitably stagnate the magic economic growth that China has been witnessing. But this irrational jubilation was short lived, as it ultimately disappeared with the rapid spread of COVID 19 as a global pandemic which has now brutally wounded the USA as the current epicenter, whereas China has slowly begun to recover from its eleventh-hour moment. The unexpected situation erupted in the West before coping with the corona virus, and was followed by China’s evasive global aid campaign against corona virus as the Chinese opted for “mask diplomacy” by sending medical supplies to European countries, and the portrayal of China as the scapegoat was vindicated by these actions.

Notwithstanding the various efforts made by China in boosting their global dominance and the strategies adopted by IR pundits in Washington in decimating China’s rise, the indispensable reality is that both China and the USA would emerge from the post corona epoch as diminished powers. In writing an opinion piece to “Foreign Affairs”, former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd has aptly remarked that now decline awaits China and the USA in a post COVID world which would eventually create an anarchic order in international politics. He says “Neither a *Pax Sinica* or renewed *Pax Americana* will rise from the ruins. Rather both powers will be weakened both at home and abroad. And the result will be a continued slow but steady drift toward international anarchy across everything

from international security to trade to pandemic management”.¹ As a matter of fact, the global pandemic has shown how states are susceptible, furthermore the impact of corona has created a huge public resentment among the masses in both China and the USA regarding the inefficacy shown by political authorities in deploying some solid mechanism in controlling the situation. From one side China has been lampooned for the negligent manner of concealing the corona virus when it emerged in Wuhan last year and this act has been regarded as a breach of WHO international health regulations. On the other side the USA’s power, especially Trump’s extreme negligent manner of managing the situation, has mortified the US ability before the whole world creating an indelible impression as a state incapable of handling its own internal crisis.

The possible decay of both the USA and China will weaken their predilection for global hegemony; the global international situation we witnessed prior to the outbreak of COVID 19 was on a verge of a new cold war between the USA and China as a result of Chinese strategy, which was encompassing the US world dominance at a larger scale. Furthermore, the US allies’ trust in Washington had reached a nadir by virtue of the Trump administration’s less supportive actions, which castrated the affinity which existed among the Atlantic order by paving the path for China to increase its influence. Nevertheless, the grave consequences that have risen from Corona seems to be pivotal factors to debilitate both nations. As a matter of fact, the susceptibility of both countries’ capacities in a post corona world order will alter the whole global spectrum, indicating the path for an anarchic structure.

In ascertaining the possible anarchic order in a post COVID 19 epoch, relying on India’s all-time strategist Kautilya’s reading of anarchy appears to be a structurally important factor as he aptly elucidated the status of anarchy in his monumental work “*Arthashastra*”. Describing the persistent nature of conflicts among the states when there is no law or government to uphold the justice, Kautilya argues such a system would inevitably create an anarchy as small states become victims of stronger ones.² The doctrine “*Matsya Nyaya*” is the name Kautilya used to illustrate the anarchic order which was akin to the Hobbesian understating of a brutal, miserable stage of human life. However, it is important to understand that seminal account of Kautilya was not intended to admire the majesty of anarchism, as the support of strong rulers was entirely pervaded in his political philosophy. Yet, it would be an indispensable factor to trace his attitude towards establishing universal peace known as “*Sarva Bauma*” that can be equated with the ideal global state as what Dante depicted in *De Monarchia*, where he argues the man should pursue the happiness of earthly life and eternal life. Indicating his commitment to a pan-Indian federation of states under one strong ruler, Kautilya proposed this notion *Sarva Bauma* as a Hindu principle of universal sovereignty or a world state emerging out of the universal anarchy. Hindu political thoughts produced several other categories to express the same idea of the world state or universal sovereignty. We have, first, the doctrine of *chakravarti*. It indicates that the chakra or wheel of the state chariot rolls everywhere without obstruction.³ The wheel is the symbol of sovereignty Or, if chakra be taken as denoting a country from sea to sea, the *chakravarti* would be the ruler of a state from sea to sea.

¹ Kevin Rudd, “*The Coming Post Covid Anarchy*”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2020.05.06 (Accessed 2020.06.01)

² George Modelski, “*Kautilya, Foreign Policy and International System in the Ancient Hindu World*”, *American Political Science Review*, (Vol.58, No.3, 1964), pp.549-560.

³ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “*Hindu Theory of International Relations*”, *American Political Science Review* (Vol.13, No.3, 1919), pp.400-414.

From a general point of view, it may appear to be a rather ambiguous and clueless approach to even imagine how analysis in ancient Hinduism of an anarchy or world state under “*Sarva Bauma*” can be possible in a modern complex world, especially in an era where state sovereignties are becoming stronger as a result of the rhetoric propounded by the populist leaders with nationalist agendas. Ostensibly, in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, the nation-state-centered solutions appear to be the solace for citizens as regional mechanisms like the European Union have ruined their hopes on integration. But the inefficiency of states in handling the situation while curtailing many of the civil liberties of its citizens in order to minimize the risk has given a hesitating vibe about the potentiality of states to cope with a global calamity. Also, there is an underlying contradiction between the reality of a phenomenon that sees no borders and the political systems that rely on a border system as a necessity for protection. At such a critical juncture, mixed with uncertainties and xenophobic attitudes towards the minority populations, the expectations on nation-centric solutions for global issues begin to fade.

The decline of both the US and Chinese influence in the aftermath of COVID 19 and the above mentioned severe drawbacks of the nation-centric problem-solving mechanism can intensify the anarchic flow of future global political order. IR theorist Alexander Wendt’s famous aphorism is that “Anarchy is what states makes of it”.⁴ Under that logic states are responsible for the outcomes in world politics, which leads us to assess how current chaos arising from the COVID 19 crisis has drastically changed the role of states. While writing a long research article titled “Why a World State is Inevitable?” in 2003 Wendt argued about the need to transform the plural identities existing among the territorial states which is required for the formation of a global state. Furthermore, he pointed out the how territorial states can be feeble in the long run when they are surrounded by more complex problems. He states “They may be local equilibria, but, they inhabit a system that is in disequilibrium, the resolution of which leads to a world state”.⁵

The ideas written by Wendt in 2003 appear to be more pertinent in the current context, along the with global discontent we are undergoing currently, whereas the state apparatus and regional organization have significantly failed in demonstrating their competency. It is a fact beyond a conjecture that states and nations don’t always yearn for power, wealth, and security as the most pivotal factors, but the genuine concern for individual identities and collective identities cannot be forgotten in terms of what people expect from the states.

In contrasting with our initial argument of ancient Hindu doctrine of “*Sarva Bauma*” or the possibility of a world state order, we need to realize the Indic conceptions such as Hinduism and Buddhist teachings preferred the universal order as the best alternative to avail the good will of the people. On the other hand, as a system of living developed in ancient India, Hinduism had witnessed how state after state failed themselves in upholding a long term peace among the people, as states always yearned for more interstate conflicts which finally resulted in their own decline.

There arise some very pertinent questions regarding the conceptual understanding of the word World Government, and to further hyphenate it with the more judiciously explainable concept of the government where the regulatory regimes of the post-cold War liberal world order had been understood and accepted as the irreversible path. As the disruptive events in the annals of global history have taught us, COVID 19 is a robust black swan event. The grand geopolitical, geo-economical and more so geo-cultural flux matrices have come to a sudden and screeching halt and

⁴ Alexander Wendt, “*Anarchy is what states make of it : The Social Construction of Power Politics*”, International Organization, (Vol.6,No.2,1992), pp.392-425.

⁵ Alexander Wednt, “ *Why World State is Inevitable?*” European Journal of International Relations, 2003,p.491.

the governments (sovereign and quasi-sovereign alike) are going through a massive and unprecedented stress test to preserve their legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens and subjects, and while the capacity of the states has been exposed and measured in many cases in not so favourable terms, the question that comes at the forefront is the Agenda setting of the Global Governance.

Do we think that the global economic model that is going through much scrutiny after 2008 is going to be the salvation for the most unfortunate subjects of this transnational governance structure? What kind of re-distributive and inclusive agenda shall be prioritized and recalibrated to further harmonize the seamless functioning of the governance that is global by nature? With the flurry of the transnational corporations and the transnational movements grooving for a long global citizenship narrative, how will the populist and conservative political forces bring a spanner in the running wheel of transnational global governance?

The other question that does demand a strong deliberation is whether this global governance is witnessing the terminal weakening and the loss of face of the global governance institutions such as the massive lambasting faced by the WHO during COVID 19, when borders get sealed and each one is for oneself is practiced to the brim at the initial stage of utter confusion and desperation. To ascertain and identify the possible answers to these queries, one agrees that few pre-conditions must maintain and consolidate in the formative aspect of global governance. The vast and inclusive cognitive ability has to match with the global strategic goals that can be achieved through the overwhelming resource dominance and a great longing on the part of the subjects/citizens to be a part of this enterprise.

In conclusion, we believe that a post-Covid 19 World Order has to internalize the exposure and the silent acknowledgement of the inevitable reengagement of the local with the global aspiration where the control and care for concerns has a certain immediacy and instantaneous feature. Besides, as we argued further as understood in the Public Policy lexis, the advocacy coalition of the global governance structure shall be hybrid in nature, incorporating the difficult peace, as so much is at stake and none of the major players shall like to exhaust the remaining leverage after the commotion settles in.

An optimistic assumption can be that the bruising and unnerving period that reached its crescendo with COVID shall force the deflated egoistic states for far more cooperation and trade-off, yet any incentives to the totalitarian and authoritarian big states shall only whet the appetite for the revisionist agenda from the other side. It is highly plausible that the world in the post-COVID period shall await a Great Deal, albeit in the global scale to consolidate the gains of the many years and countless sacrifices. History does not forgive, yet we are told that we don't learn much from history either. The world has kept its fingers crossed at this precipice moment, with the hope still flickering somewhere deep within that someone is in control of the supremely inexplicable things!

