

Survival of the 'Unfit': Constructing the Compromised Citizens through a Comparative Study of the AIDS Epidemic and the COVID-19 Pandemic in India

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Abstract

In the history of pandemics and epidemics, hate, 'otherization' and foreignness have been very prevalent, right from the introductory to their concluding phases. This article seeks to draw inferences from the consequential effects of the AIDS epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic in India, in order to study the hermeneutics of pandemics and isolation, and how these have triggered the already existing definitions of citizenship and led to the reframing and restructuring of the same. Instead of focusing on the singular moral aspect of the pandemic and the epidemic as either 'good' or 'evil', it aims to represent the negotiable juxtaposition of these as driving forces not only walling out the disadvantaged groups, but also simultaneously producing political meanings and effects, which are characterised by exclusionary processes, as in the case of citizenship, but not limited to it. The sudden visibility of the invisible interstate migrant workers during COVID-induced countrywide lockdown and that of the 'sexual minorities' when the AIDS epidemic first started wreaking havoc in India in the late twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, will be discussed to examine their positions through Nikolas Rose's concept of 'Biological Citizenship' and how diseases, sometimes, act as the only determinants of an identity of belonging.

Key words: Citizenship, COVID, HIV/AIDS, migrants, sexual minorities