

# A Pandemic and the Politics of Life

by

**Professor Ranabir Samaddar**

(Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies

Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata.)

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## **Abstract**

The Pandemic is the background of the emergence of what, following some philosophers, we may call the politics of life. Politics of Life indicates a reorientation of politics towards issues of life and death, in other words, reorienting political issues as being those of life and death. It emerges from the conjunctures of history when life and death become the most crucial issues of social life, such as moments of crises like a massive war, famine, pestilence, or epidemic, when life questions become paramount. At the core of the politics of life is bio-politics from below, which may be understood as a congealed form of the response of the lower classes in society to the crisis of life, such as in the present epidemiological crisis, and the threat of impending death. As such, it stands face-to-face with biopolitics from above, which takes the form of neoliberal rule. Neoliberal rule realises itself by transforming the issues of life into those of market accessibility and productivity, and of a rational calculation of 'necessary deaths' in order to ensure social life. Bio-politics from below is fundamentally horizontal in nature. The solidarity it evokes and the trust it bases itself on in order to protect life run along a horizontal line. A politics of life needs vertical mobilisation as well as horizontal mobilisation to become hegemonic. Such a combination of horizontal and vertical mobilisation on issues of life suggests a new form of public power which will facilitate the horizontal mobilisation of social power to protect life, and at the same time, will be able to invoke collective power to do so. Its function of facilitating social mobilisation on issues of life is predicated on its capacity to create trust among ordinary people in its general power to protect society. In the realm of bio-politics from below, which displays in capillary form the values of care, protection, and solidarity, the issue of the protection of the migrant, and in particular, migrant labour, assumes critical significance. A crisis such as an epidemic reveals the organic composition of bio-politics and bio-power. An analysis of this organic composition leads us to an appreciation of the phenomenon of the politics of life.