

Covid-19 in Ancient Indian Traditional System:

Some Aspects from Indian History & Traditions

Dr. Amit Kumar Singh

Assistant Professor

Post Graduate Department of History

Dev Samaj College for Women, Ferozpur City, Punjab

amit.maitraya@gmail.com

+91-9463403074

Abstract

Covid-19 is emerged as a new challenge of 21st century but it is not absolutely new as many similar incidents and descriptions are available in Indian and surrounding traditions like Tibet and China. There are several strong instances of the disease and its remedies available in ancient Indian Texts i.e. Smritis & Vedas. This research paper is an exploration of the description, analysis and remedies of covid 19 in Ancient Indian Knowledge system.

Introduction

Covid-19 is emerged as a challenge for mankind in 21st Century as no effective medication is invented yet due to the changing patterns in the mutation of the Corona virus. 20th century witnesses three pandemics caused by Corona virus which are SARS, MERS, Covid-19. The mortality rate is increasing with the next version. All these three editions of the Corona are emerged from bats. However, it is yet to research how the virus transferred from bats to human although the rapid human to human transmission confirmed widely.

History of Covid-19

In human history the first case of Corona virus was notified in 1960 as cough & cold. A study in Canada took place in 2001 reported 500 people infected by the Corona virus in 1960 having flu like system. It is also reported that 18 % cases were under infection of mutant corona virus of polymerase chain reaction. Till 2002, corona was not fatal and the treatment was as simple asof cold but after 2003, the spread was reported in US, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand & Vietnam. With the time several cases of corona were reported and mortality went up to 1000 in the same year.

Year 2003 was challenging for microbiologists. In course of understanding the pathogenesis of disease the infection spread up to 8096 people and in 2004 World Health Organization in collaboration with Centre for disease control & prevention declared “state emergency”.

By the same year 50 more patients were confirmed of severe acute respiratory syndrome in which 30 of them were confirmed as corona infected. By 2012, The same symptomatic cases were visible in Saudi Arabia caused several deaths. The cases of Covid-19 were not identified as pneumonia till 2019. In Wuhan, China Corona was termed as Covid-19 and most of the severe cases of Corona were reported as pneumonia. Till the date, Corona virus turmoiled the lives of millions of people throughout the World.

Corona in Ancient Indian Texts: Atharv Ved& Charak Samhita

Although, the medical science is on back foot for the effective treatment of Covid-19, hence, scholars are seeking alternate treatment methods apart from allopathy. Surprisingly, a coronavirus-like virus has been described in ancient ayurvedic scriptures about 5,000 years ago. 60 % of *Atharva Veda* is devoted to *Ayurveda*. Many chapters of *Charak Samhita* is based on *Atharva Veda*. In *Charak Samhita* many chapters deal with pandemics and ways to fight with them. Dr Smita Naram,

founder and CMD of *Ayu-shakti* revealed that she was surprised to find a chapter in *Charak Samhita* called '*Krimi*' i.e. infections, in the '*Charak Samhita*' that describes an infection exactly like the novel coronavirus. *Charak Samhita* named it '*ShleshmaKrimi*' and that is not visible through naked eyes. *Charak Samhita* termed the virus as '*MahaSukshma*' (too minute). *Charak Samhita* mentions that *ShleshmaKrimi* infects the respiratory system and resulted in cough, cold, breathlessness which leads to death. *Atharva Ved* mentions that the virus gets strengthened through the food which contains '*Kafa*' (mucus)¹ Same is true for Covid 19 too.

Corona mentioned in Ancient Tibetan Text :Gyud-Zhi

Similar information about corona Virus and its wider effect is also found in old Tibetan text '*Gyud-Zhi*. It is a 2,500-year-old text of Tibet and the Himalayan regions. *Gyud-Zhi* terms epidemics as "*Nyen-Rim*" and describes that "In *Kaliyuga*, due to disturbance in *Maras(Saitan)* and *Dakinis(Deities)* caused by shameful and malign attitude of human towards nature. The epidemic spread through the breath, turns into cloud and become pandemics. The text says, contaminated food would increase the severity of pandemic. The symptoms of *Nyen-Rim* (epidemic) are pulmonary infections, cough, breathing problems, abdominal aches, dysentery, fever, perspiration, weakness, and the appearance of dark pimples. The Tibetan text further elaborates that the virus "*TretTre Ho*" is invisible and moves like lightning, and is made up of wind and fire elements.² The symptoms of the disease "*TretTre Ho*" and effects are exactly same as Covid-19 of the modern times.

¹<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/5000-year-old-ancient-scriptures-describe-something-similar-coronavirus-1668405-2020-04-18>

²<https://www.deccanherald.com/metrolife/metrolife-cityscape/ancient-text-knew-a-lot-about-pandemic-903043.html>

Quarantine Practices in Ancient India

Quarantine word is derived from the Italian word 'QuarantaGiorni' which means forty days. Today the entire World is using the term Quarantine to avoid the infection of highly communicable disease covid-19. Bible also use the same word to refrain people from the communicable diseases.³

In Indian tradition, the words '*Sutak*' & '*Patak*' refer to quarantine and have been the part of Indian's life style, applied when the probability of contamination was to high. '*Sutak*' was the quarantine practice for the mother and newly born child, just after the birth of child for 10 to 40 days to prevent immunocompromised mother and child from possible contaminations.

The '*Sutak*' period was not same for different strata of the society. It was different for different classes. Forty days were recommended to recover the body completely in order to sustain their health. The recovery time was different for different varnas. The 40 days recovery time was recommended for *Sudras*, 16-20 days for *Vaishyas*, 12 for *Kshatriyas* and 10 days for *Brahmanas*. During the '*Sutaka*' period, the other family members were restricted to go outside gatherings.⁴

Protective Measures inbuilt in Indian Tradition

In *Sanatan Dharma* we find several ways to protect one from viruses, inbuilt in Indian culture and tradition. These practices which are invoked suddenly to counter covid 19 pandemics would have been part of Ancient Indian lifestyle. The concept of hygiene and healthy management of wastes were integral part of

³Leviticus 13:47-59, New Testament.

⁴Thomas M. Lennon, The battle of Gods and Giants, The legacies of discards & gissendi, 1655-1715. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993

thereligious and cultural value system of India. In Atharva Veda and Manu Smriti Nature is regarded as ‘Mother’ and ‘adorable’. To pollute any part of nature is termed as ‘Sin’.⁵ Sin is that crime which returns to the human in the form of ‘Existential Punishment’ through the law of *Karma* inevitably. The concept of hygiene was thus obligatory for all as a part of our culture. Indian greeting way of *Namaskar* is rich, deep and hygienic way to greet someone. Through this way one indicates towards the ultimate truth of universal oneness.

The practice of frequent washing of hand is highly recommended in pandemic time. It was remained an integral and significant part of Indian religio-cultural aspects. The culture of hand wash is mentioned as ‘Shaucha’ in ancient Indian texts as in Yoga Sutra of Patanjali *Saucha* is described as –

शौचा स्वांग जुगुप्सा परे संगसः

सत्त्व शुद्धिः सौम्यने कामेन्द्रिय जयात्सम

दसानन योग्यत्स्य वाचनः (2.41)

‘*Saucha*’ is detachment towards contact with others, *Saucha* provides purity, contentment and victory over senses to attain self-realizations’.⁶

According to Manu Smriti *Saucha* is one of the four duties as

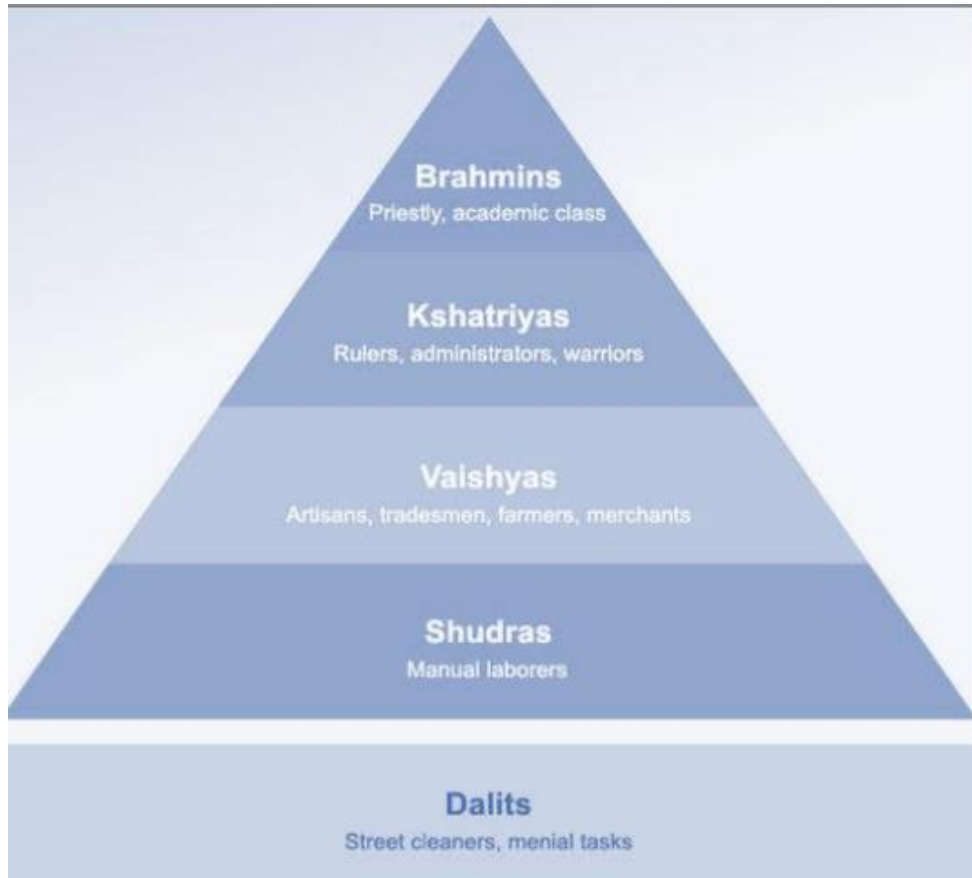
⁵Manusmriti the Laws of Manu –Introduction accessed online at <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/sacredscripts/hinduism/dharma/manusmriti.asp> accessed on 18/05/20

⁶The Concept of Shaucha or Cleanliness in Hindu Dharma. March 23, 2020. Nithin Sridhar. Available online at <https://www.cisindus.org/2020/03/23/the-concept-of-shaucha-or-cleanliness-in-hindu-dharma/a>

अहिंसा सत्यम आस्तेयम शौचं इन्द्रिय निग्रहः

एतम सामासिकं धर्मम, चतुर्वर्णं अब्रविम मन्वयः ॥⁷

In Varna System, there was the concepts of untouchables in Ancient Indian. Those people who were involved in the cleanliness and sanitation were lived out of vicinity and called *Antyaj* (out landers) treated as untouchables. If we ignore the human right issues for the time being and keep only hygiene in the mind then this practice seems to very relevant for the prevention of communicable diseases like Covid-19. The following picture shows the clear depiction of Varna System and the separation of outcaste people from rest of the society.



⁷Learning-Living manu smriti 10.63 : dharma in summary available online at <http://www.learning-living.com/2017/11/manu-smriti-1063-dharma-in-summary.html>

Use of *Gamachha* and Vagitarianism were also vital for the protection from the contagious diseases. Face Masks now a days are the updated versions of *Gamchhas*. In India, *Gamchha* is a cotton cloth which is traditionally in use in various parts as mask, scarf, turban and for wiping sweats. It may have different names in different part of the country. It can be easily used by anyone as compared to the surgical mask, which is costly, short of supply and has a specific way to use.⁹

Conclusion

Covid-19 and its spread are the outcome of modern life style and ignorance of the Ancient Indian concept of sustainable development. In Vedic lifestyle and other ancient Indian texts, the living styles are recommended which were able to protect us from the pandemics like covid-19. Covid-19 is the result of self-centric attitude of mankind which believes in consumerism. The highest ideal of Indian intelligentsia was universal peace and welfare. As it is mentioned in ancient texts

‘सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामया,
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद् दुःख भागभवेत्।’

This is the need of the hour to adopt the highest goal for the mankind for its long survival. The goal must be in the favor of universal sustenance and welfare. We must adopt our ancient wisdom. As discussed, and analyzed above through the instances of different ancient Indian texts and social structure the pandemic and its fear were well known to our ancestors. They regulated the lifestyle in a way

⁸Source - <https://www.iapsmupuk.org/journal/index.php/IJCH/article/view/1628/1039>

⁹CDC Atlanta. Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

that the ill effects of pandemic could not touch the mankind. The vast change in our values, education system and disease management is dire need of the time.

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