

## Covid-19 and ancient Indian culture and civilization: A analytical study

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### Abstract

Do you know the actual weight of this so called corona virus? You will be shocked when I will tell you it's just 0.000000000000000000085 grams and if we collect all the viruses in the body of recovered and presently active cases, it is less than 2 gms. So this data proves us that eternal, almighty force i.e., God tell us our limits that we should live in our limits because 2 grams of virus is enough to disturb this all so called developed and developing world aka Russia, China and USA who are bragging of their inventions and power in news, newsprints, conferences, associations etc. But our Indian culture is still in our limits. We still perform rituals and *Puja* to show respect towards sacred trees, animals, rivers, stones and many others. So, this paper shows you what and how our culture consist all the precautions and our traditions guide us not to misbalances the "Prakriti".

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Civilization, corona virus

### 1. Introduction

We are facing the greatest pandemic in history globally- one that is killing people, spreading human suffering and upending people's lives. The corona virus disease (COVID-19), which has been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), is attacking societies at their core.

#### Corona Viruses?

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus.

Viruses are on the borderline of living and dead beings. They are much tinier than bacteria. Their size ranges from 18nm-400nm, they do not grow on a routine laboratory media. Viruses are host cell dependent particles, they use host cell machinery to build their structure. That is why; specific anti-viral drugs which do not damage host cells are very limited.

All Corona viruses are large (120nm-160nm) enveloped RNA Viruses which have single stranded genome. The name 'corona virus' is derived from Latin *corona*, meaning "crown" or "wreath". The virus possesses a club shaped or crown like peplomer spikes giving appearance of solar corona. High rates of genetic mutations are shown by the corona viruses. Most of this infection is caused by only those which can adapt to human conditions.

In 2003, there was an outbreak of SARS-CoV (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus). It originated from China and spread to around 29 countries causing 8098 cases and 774 deaths. The source was believed to be monkeys, raccoon dogs, cats and rodents.

Another member of corona viruses, MERS-CoV (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Corona virus) emerged in 2012. First reported from Saudi Arabia, MERS-CoV has affected more than 2143 cases and 750 deaths from 27 different countries. Here, the source was thought to the camels and bats.

AS per the WHO guidelines it represents Corona Virus

Disease originated in 2019. Previously used names for COVID-19 are:

- SARS-CoV-2
- 2019-nCoV a acute respiratory disease
- Novel Coronavirus pneumonia
- Wuhan pneumonia

First case of this virus was identified in December 2019 from Wuhan, Hubei province of China. WHO declared the 2019-20 corona virus outbreaks, a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020.

#### Clinical Outcome

There are two main routes of transmission of the COVID-19 virus respiratory and contact. Common symptoms include fever, cough (mostly dry cough) and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include fatigue, muscle pain, diarrhea, sore throat, loss of smell and abdominal pain. While the majority of cases result in mild symptoms (about 80%), some progress to viral pneumonia and multi organ failure. Older people and people with other medical conditions (such as diabetes, asthma, hypertension or heart disease) are more vulnerable to become severely ill.

#### Precautions

At this point of time, prevention is the best possible treatment. Protect yourself and others around you by knowing the facts and taking appropriate precautions.

- Maintaining Social-Distancing and staying home.
- Covering mouth and nose with your bent elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands often, basic cleaning till 20 seconds. Use soap and water, hand sanitizer or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose and mouth with dirty hands.
- Wear a cloth face cover/mask.

- Disposal of used tissue immediately.
- Keep about 6feet distance with others.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, lift handles, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks.
- To disinfect- Most common household disinfectants like bleach solution will work. Use disinfectants appropriate for the surface.
- Maintain a safe distance from anyone who is coughing and sneezing.
- If you have a fever, cough and difficulty in breathing, seek medical attention. Call in advance.
- Follow the directions of your local health authority.

If we follow personal and social behavioral discipline, then the damage can be minimized.

### **An ancient Indian culture and civilization**

Culture and civilization: The word 'culture' and 'civilization' are often used synonymously. However, they have clearly defined meanings differentiating them. 'Civilization' means having better ways of living and sometimes making nature bend to fulfill their needs. It also includes organizing societies into politically well-defined groups working collectively for improved conditions of life in matters of food, dress, communication, habits and so on.

On the other hand 'culture' refers to the inner being, a refinement of head and heart. Cultural development is a historical process. Culture may be defined as the way an individual and especially a group live, think, feel and organize themselves, celebrate and share life. Culture has different characteristics. It can be acquired, lost or shared. It is cumulative. It is dynamic, diverse and gives us a range of permissible behavior-pattern. It can change. Culture includes both material and non-material components. This includes arts and sciences, music and dance and various higher pursuits of human life which are also classified as cultural activities. One who may be poor and wearing cheap clothes may be considered 'uncivilized', but still he or she may be the most cultured person. One possessing ostentatious wealth may be considered as 'civilized' but he may not be 'cultured'

Therefore, when we think of culture, we have to understand that it is different from civilization. As we have seen, culture is the 'higher levels of inner refinement' of a human being. Humans are not merely physical beings. They live and act at three levels: *physical, mental and spiritual*. While better ways of living socially and politically and better utilization of nature around us may be termed as civilization. This is not enough to be cultured. Only when the deeper levels of a person's intellect and consciousness are brought into expression can we call him/her 'cultured'.

An ancient Indian culture and civilization: India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety, its history and culture is dynamic, spanning back to the beginning of human civilization. India has a continuous history covering a very long period. Evidence of Neolithic habitation dating as far back as 7000 BC has been found in Mehrgarh in Baluchistan. However, the first notable civilization flourished in India around 2700 BC in the north western part of the Indian subcontinent, covering a large area. The civilization is referred to as the Harappan civilization. Most of the sites of this civilization developed

on the banks of Indus, Ghaggar and its tributaries. The Harappa's built the earliest cities complete with town planning, sanitation, drainage system and broad well-laid roads. The great bath at Mohenjo-Daro, our earliest sanitation system. By the end of the fourth millennium BC, India has emerged as a region of highly developed civilization.

Culture is a way of life. You, your family has a culture and so does your region and your country. You may be curious to know about the uniqueness of Indian culture. Indian culture is as many sided as life. It includes intellectual and social aspects of any human being. It also takes account of the aesthetic instinct as well as the spiritual impulses of human being. India is a vast country with a lot of diversity in her physical and social environment. We see people around us speaking different languages, having different religions and practising different rituals, diversities in their food habits and dress patterns.

I am sure you have often asked yourself why you are studying history. Studying history is one way of getting to know the past. History is an attempt to understand how and why our ancestors lived as they did, what difficulties they met with and in what manner they overcame them. It is important for you to be acquainted with the past to understand better what is happening in the India of today. The outbreak of corona virus is alerting the world about global public healthcare. World may call us poor, illiterate country but we know the basics of life and nature. In 2020 everyone is thinking over the New Lifestyle i.e. Lockdown, self-isolation quarantine etc.

Leaving to adopt the western culture without knowing the facts. There were many traditional practices in our society which give a sense of social distancing and quarantine for our and other's well-being. Let us review our way of life, traditions methods etc. with world today. It follows as:

### **Periodic quarantine rituals in our culture and civilization**

**Say Namaste:** Namaste, which is also known as Namaskaar, Namaskaaram, and Pranam, a gesture in yoga used to greet people and convey the cultural expression. The meaning of namaste means, "*I bow down to the divinity within you*". Namaste originally originate from a Sanskrit word, "Namah", which means 'I bow to', or in other words "salutations or prostration to" and 'te' or 'twam' means 'You'. The joining of both palms together express togetherness, acceptance, coherence and gratitude. It is behaviour practice where there is no need for physical touch between two individuals to show their gratitude, respect, inclusiveness and integrity. The scientific reason behind this to minimise the transfer of any kind of germs and diseases and stops to spread the negativities that can be in the form of spiritually or as a form of individual energy.

### **Natak (new-born baby and mother in isolation)**

Today, the whole world is using the term 'quarantine' to fight with the COVID-19 which is a communicable disease. The word 'quarantine' was derived from the Italian words *Quaranta giorni* which means 40 days. The book of Leviticus in the Bible refers to restrictions for leprosy and the word quarantine was used to try and prevent the spread of the Black Death in the 14th century. Quarantine is practiced in our society since ancient times during birth and death when chances of contamination are high. As per old

traditions in India, the term 'Natak' and 'Sutak' were used in place of isolation or quarantine and recommended during the time of birth and death of someone in society. In the most part of India, people are used to knowing it as 'sutak' in death case and Natak in birth case. The science behind Natak signifies that the proposed isolation for the next 11 to 14 days was necessary to prevent immunocompromised mother and child from all possible contamination. 'Natak' recommends keeping new-born baby and mother in isolation for ten to forty days. Modern science also uses an incubator to keep immature infants in isolation until their adaptation in the new environment.

The period of 'natak' helped the mother to recover her weakness or revitalized her after delivery. Otherwise, it might not be possible during those days when tradition to have a joint family was quite common. After the delivery, the mother was not allowed to mix with people and remains to be isolated in a separate room for a period of ten to forty days, depending upon her caste which defines her workload.

**Sutak:** The concept of Sutak is based with the context of Ritual Purity in the Vedic tradition. Ritual Purity and its understanding is a major aspect of any religious tradition. At its heart, there is a belief that humans exist in a natural state of uncleanness, and this 'uncleanness' is not just physical, but spiritual as well. However, any emanation from the body is considered unclean. Association with the divine requires purification at all levels.

Observation of 'sutak' after the death of a family member is a highly meaningful ceremony. This is also a form of thirteen days quarantine which includes a restriction to any kind of participation in worship, recitation of holy books, visiting holy places and other's house, attending a public function or a ceremony. People were used to organize recitation of some holy book like Shreemad Bhagwatgeeta, Garud Puran, Garun Purana etc. for family members during these days so they can keep themselves busy, calm and spiritual. The science behind 'sutak' explains that death may occur due to long sickness, contagious disease, old age or some miss happening. If a person dies from a contagious disease, the belongings of that person and other family members may become a contact for others. The fumes and ashes present in cremation ground also increase the chances of contamination. A compulsory bath after the cremation of the dead body was recommended to avoid any kind of infection during cremation. Chewing of Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Timur (*Zanthoxylum armatum*) leaves which is recognized as a medicinal plant and well known for its antibacterial, antimalarial, antiviral, and antifungal properties was also an essential practice after the cremation. Simultaneously, women were responsible to clean the house and discard all personal belongings of the dead people. The period of 'sutak' may recognise as quarantine period for contacts and help to stop the spread of any possible contagious disease, among others.

**Arr-rinam:** *Arr-rinam* is the Galo equivalent of lockdown imposed by consensus for 48 hours whenever an epidemic strikes. The Galos, one of the 26 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, last performed this almost four decades ago when a water-borne disease had affected many members of the community. This prohibits the entry and exit of the people into and from the village.

**Pator:** The ancient "pator" ritual involves animal sacrifice done at the time of calamities including epidemics that inflict animals. The Adi tribal areas, for instance, implement

traditional lockdown system a day before the national curfew. Prevent entry of outsiders by barricades with bamboo gates.

**Arrue:** Self quarantine ritual performed of villages.

**Solidarity:** Over the course of the colonial rule, Sardar Vallabh bhai Patel, popularly remembered as Iron Man of India, successfully imbibed the spirit of solidarity within the citizens of the country. To realize his vision, 'Statue of Unity' was unveiled as world's tallest statue in 2018, taller than the Statue of Liberty.

**Keep Gamchaaa:** A piece of cloth that every old man carries with him in order to keep himself clean in sweat and dirt. *Today we are wearing mask in 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**The traditional belief- feet are considered unclean:** It is a traditional belief that feet are unclean adding footwear as more unclean. The custom of removing your shoes before entering a home is widely practiced in Indian home only because of cleanliness. 'Eating food with your hands feeds not only the body but also the mind and spirit', eating with clean hands in India is believed to have a cleaner plate and happier stomach. Similarly, washing hands before and after eating meals.

**Yoga and meditation:** (atha yoga-anuśāsanam) which means "now, the practice of yoga begins," is easy to dismiss.

According to ancient Indian scripts it is firmly believed that man must act or perform any actions according to nature/sun. Brahma Muhurat (the creator's hour) is the time which starts 1 hour 36 min before sunrise and ends after 48 min after sunrise, the most appropriate time for yoga and meditation. Meditation and yoga are synonymous with India and Indian spirituality. Meditation is one of the most important components of Yoga, which is a mind-body therapy involving a series of exercises. Yogic techniques control the body, mind and sense organs. Today, in this anxious situation which is stressing people daily morning yoga therapy is best method to keep ourselves calm and healthy.

**Cooking in earthen utensils:** Our ancestors must have cooked food in earthenware because they did not know about plastic, steel and aluminum. But that was not only the reason for it, cooking in clay pots adds calcium. Phosphorous, iron, magnesium, sulphur and several other minerals to food. Clay pots are also alkaline in nature so they mix well with acidic food and balance its PH level. Remember, deadly diseases like cancer do not develop in an alkaline atmosphere.

**Aparigraha:** Aparigraha is a concept of non – attachment, non-possessiveness or non-coveting. It is the Sanskrit word for greedlessness. We can say that today we have to live a life with limited resources. It practice the principles as let it go, breathe, self-care, be-positive, forgive and generosity.

**Indian kitchen's wonder spices "TURMERIC":** The use of turmeric dates back nearly 4000 years to the Vedic culture of India, where it as use as a culinary spice and had some religious significance. It emerges as an important part of ayurvedic medicine. It contains the flavonoid curcumin, known for its anti-inflammatory properties, detoxifies the liver, fights allergies, stimulates digestion and boosts immunity.

Our traditional practices are indigenous, based on knowledge, research, skills, and long experiences. These have been developed scientifically and rationally to cope up

with differing situations. These ancient practices are always given priorities by scholars and conventional scientists who look for sustainable solutions. But with time, our society believes that these are superstition and have started losing them from one generation to another. However, the current pandemic is giving a message to revisit and revalidate the customs which are authentic even in the present scenario and based on scientific principles.

World is learning the social distancing in 21<sup>st</sup> century but we Indians are familiar with this long time ago through *Arinam*, *Pator*, *use of gamcha* etc. We know that some migrants like British, Turk and Mughal were engaged in killing culture hard. Whether it was Lord Macaulay committee on breaking our Gurukul Education or Mughal burning of Takshila University. But in this pandemic we are information about our pious culture. Takshila and Taranasi emerged as centre of medicine and learning. Do you know that Ayurveda has lately become very popular in the western world? This is because of its many advantages over the modern system of medicine called Allopathy, which is of western origin. Ayurveda, the most important and the indigenous system of medicine was developed in Ancient India which means the science of good health and longevity of life. The surgeons in ancient India were familiar with plastic surgery (repair of noses, ears and lips). Charak is called the father of ayurvedic medicine and Susruta the father of surgery. Susruta, Charak, Madhava, Vagbhatta and Jeevak were noted ayurvedic practitioners. This ancient Indian system of medicine not only helps in treatment of diseases but also in finding the causes and symptoms of diseases. Education of those times was primarily life skills based which is so different from what education is today.

Now, at present the efforts we put on to attain good health have roots back in Indian religious books and scriptures. *'Early to bed early to rise, makes man healthy wealthy and wise'*, rising early in the morning has been prescribed discipline of ancient Indian tradition. Waking up at the Brahmamuhurt before sunrise influences the process of attention, imbibes virtues, control over senses and brings positivity to our mind present in the atmosphere. Traditionally, Indians are the Worshipers of Nature, the Peepal tree rituals performed in India as *Vat savitri puja*, the Banyan tree used for metaphorical reference in the Vedic scriptures written in ancient Sanskrit, as National tree of India etc has religious importance. Besides, carries a number of significant medicinal qualities and formed the core of ancient Indian medicine. Today we use dettol, savlon to clean water before bathing but India widely used neem products as neem leaves have anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties. Villagers of Tamil Nadu used neem and turmeric to sanitize the streets in recent. Another example, the use of cow dung which is most importantly seen in villages of India as manure, natural source of fuel, useful in making walls and floor of huts, repellent to mosquitoes and as cheap thermal insulator. It contains anti-bacterial and anti-viral properties which keeps away germs from us. Whereas the effect of chemical fertilizers are negative for the environment and for ourselves. In Indian custom, members of the family use to remove their shoes, wash their feet and hands before entering the house so that the virus, germs or dirt do not enter the home.

Today, this pandemic has hit hard on the lifestyle of human society apart from its environmental aspect, which was an act against nature by humans, healed itself. Originating from

wet markets, in case of CoVID-19, the primary source is bats and mediatory sources are Pangolins and the mutation occurs in humans. The guidelines provided by WHO today is focused on social distancing and washing hands in order to maintain personal hygiene to protect the people across the world. Changing the global habits at work, home and in worship; Bye-Bye to handshakes, refuses kiss on the cheeks, avoiding hugging and other physical contact gestures used by countries like China, France, Brazil, Germany, Spain etc provides the New normal today. This new normal lifestyle adapted today by humans across the world, is already running in India directly or indirectly by their traditions, culture, custom, value norms etc as a 'WAY OF LIFE'. So, I would say that adding to the modern lifestyle we definitely need to regain our culture, our habits that inherited years back and teach the importance of Indian culture, traditions norms and values as the Vishwaguru. I feel proud that we are the Indians, the Vishwaguru.

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