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## **PRACTICED MYTHS AND SUPERSTITIOUS-BELIEF ASSOCIATED WITH COVID 19 FROM INDIAN PERSPECTIVE.**

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### **Abstract**

Every country was affected by the Corona Virus globally and India was not free from that. The invisible enemy was not only infecting in a lightning speed but also it had been mutating constantly to worsen the situation. The impact was crossed the barrier of physical health to affect mental health. Helpless and panic-stricken people were ready to take any means to survive. The objective of the study was to examine origination, orientation and the impact of these parameters from psychological as well as sociological perspective. The study was based on the analysis of various primary data sources like journals, media reports, WHO's reports, various medical agencies, and websites etc. It was found that people were gathering in places for worshipping or celebrating rituals violating social distancing norms. From the first wave to second wave misbelieves and superstitions were well oriented in India. It was traced that the myths and superstitious-believes were associated with Covid-19 especially from the sociological perspective.

**Key Words: Myths, Superstitious-Belief, Covid 19, Orientation.**

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**Introduction:**

An atmosphere of fears and suspicion was emerged out among the large sections of populations due to the most unprecedented global crisis, COVID-19. A novel virus strain called 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)' was responsible for this drastic situation. Behavioural uncertainty, highly contagious nature of the microbe affected the society biologically, culturally, socially as well as environmentally without discriminating gender, age, ethnicity, race, education, migration, marital status, minority and class. From time-to-time World Health Organization (WHO) provided various preventive measures to combat with this pandemic. But the unavailability of exact cure along with the inadequate amount of hospital beds, ICU, various lifesaving drugs, PPE, mask, sanitizer etc led a large number of people to believe the unbelievable. Being Panic stricken and socially insecure, surprisingly people were depending both on medical science and divine power simultaneously. The primordial inclination of survival makes the people of the society to resort to any means. People were leaning towards superstitions as the disease was spreading in a lightning speed while no proper medication to treat the disease is available. Confined in the domain of uncertainties people generally found a way through several myths and superstitions to make sense of life. Once in a century, human life had to face the uncertainty like novel coronavirus pandemic. India was going through a tough time battling the terrible second wave of COVID-19. The first wave of the pandemic had shown

enormous impact in every aspect of our society whereas the near future still remained hazy. To overcome that enormous challenge especially for public health the Government of India was taking various protective measures as well as motivating the people to cope up with appropriate behavioural changes. Unavailability of proper antidote, scarcity of vaccine, uncertainty on livelihoods and poor state of public health-care played the role of catalyst in public helplessness in our country. Such a situation was appropriate to pile up misbeliefs and superstitions in society. Besides these a lot of fake news and propaganda were circulated in social media also. Sometimes India's societal diversity had also a role for which such misbeliefs and superstitions were playing hide and seek. As a result (1) more contamination was taking place (2) improper medication causing other complications and diseases (3) an atmosphere of panic and helplessness being piled up in the society. Myth and superstitions both can be found in the domain of belief. Generally, a myth was traditional historical story or supernatural phenomenon/events. Superstition was considered as irrational belief. Such beliefs also had the influence of supernatural power. L. Park (2008) beautifully explained the concept of belief and superstition. From scientific view, when we became successful to derive laws of nature from cause and effect then only, we expressed our solidarity by the word "belief". But from the religious point of view, use of "belief" implies faith in a higher power that makes things happen. And this generally defines superstition. However, in our discussion neither we are going into

the terminological details of belief or faith or trust nor myth or superstition. Rather the extent of impact of these parameters on society during this COVID-19 pandemic was paramount importance for analysis.

**Manifestation of myth and superstition:**

At the time of 2020 and 2021 the country was dealing with the most devastating situation of corona infection. On an average 3.5 lakhs of people were getting affected daily. Scarcity of intensive care units, unavailability of medical oxygen, inadequate numbers of health personal and the high infectivity rate of the virus caused so much fear in the minds of the people that a section of people started believing myth and superstitions. Actually, people were desperate to take any means to get rid of the novel corona virus. Unfortunately, a section of social media was constantly circulating such messages among a large population.

**1. Burning candle will destroy corona:**

At the time of first corona wave in India, when lockdown and an atmosphere of panic and unsettlement was going on, it was announced to put off electric lights for all Indians at 9 pm for 9 minutes and keep the candle burning. Most of the people in the rural areas set fire with a misconception that it will destroy the Corona virus. In some areas, people had participated in lighting fireworks also.

**2. Clapping will destroy corona virus:**

On 22nd March 2020, Prime minister on behalf of the Govt. of India requested its citizen to applause to encourage the medical staff as they are fighting from the front. But some people thought that clapping and ringing bells will destroy the Corona virus. Even in some areas procession was

held with drum, bells etc.

**3. Apply cow dung and drinking cow-urine cure corona:**

A large no. of people from different states of India has taken bath in cow dung along with drinking cow's urine to escape from the Corona. But no scientific base was found for such stupendous activity. Rather several health hazards have been reported for such misbelieves.

**4. Worshipping Corona Devi:**

Only after few days, some people from the state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh gathered to worship Corona Devi to get rid of corona. To overcome their fear of death some people made sacrifices also. During the first wave, 'shilnora' was worshiped as Maa Shasthi in some villages of West Bengal. The risk of spreading corona virus increased many folds due to violation of social distancing measures in such gatherings. Wearing tree roots tied with various coloured threads on the body were common way to get rid of corona in countryside.

**5. China originated the virus in a laboratory and purposefully:**

From the very beginning of this pandemic people from all around the world eagerly wanted to know the origination of the deadly virus. There are two main theories about its origin. The first one is that it naturally came from wildlife to people. The other opinion is that the virus was escaped from research laboratory. So far there is no direct evidence for any of these concepts. As the disease was started

in Wuhan province of China, this rumour has circulated on the internet. Proper investigation and scientific research will provide the answer in future.

#### **6. Consuming alcohol can reduce infection:**

As preventive measures WHO and other health organisations recommended using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Alcohol can disinfect the skin and hence the risk of affecting by the virus decreases. But inside our body, alcohol does not have this effect. People from various states of our country misinterpreted this information and started drinking alcohol more. Such people were also reluctant to wear the mask and hand sanitization and even vaccination. Alcohol consuming increased the health risk. Ethyl alcohol denatured with methyl alcohol can severely damage the optical nerve, including death. Considering the gravity of the situation, WHO released a response regarding alcohol and COVID-19.

#### **7. High temperature will kill the virus:**

Generally, during season change, the activities of cold and flu viruses became prominent. Though in winter they spread more easily but it does not necessarily mean that their transmission stops in warmer weather. In case of SARS-CoV-2, scientists were still finding the exact behavioural changes with temperature.

#### **8. Parcels from China can spread the coronavirus:**

This is now established that virus spreads mainly via human-to-human transfer. Through tiny droplets the virus can enter

into the human body via nose or mouth or even from nose. This is why the safe distance restriction has been imposed. On various surfaces the virus remains active only for a short span of time. But in this case the time taken for a parcel to reach in India from China was too long than the lifetime of the virus on surface. So, it is unlikely to be spread from mail, products, or packaging.

#### **9. Garlic gives protection against corona virus:**

Scientifically, no evidence has been found so far that garlic could protect us from COVID-19. Although research on garlic showed that it has some antibacterial properties but COVID-19 results from a virus, not bacteria. Moreover, excessive eating of garlic can cause diarrhoea, body odour and **bad** breath as well.

#### **10. Saline water protects against the corona virus**

Generally, to get relief from nasal congestion we take saline nasal rinse. But it cannot provide protection against any respiratory infections. In case of COVID-19, no evidence has been found so far that this process can reduce the risk of infection.

#### **11. COVID-19 is ordinary flu:**

Symptoms like fever, cough, headache etc are common for flu and covid. But the extent in which covid-19 was causing the devastation in terms of infectivity or mortality that is many folds than that of flu. More than 3.4 million deaths was reported to WHO due to corona till date.

**12. Only older people will suffer:**

So far, 12% of all Covid-19 deaths in India were in age group below 45 years. It is true that older people especially those who have pre-existing health problems, such as diabetes, asthma, are more likely to become severely ill. But the disease can lead to complications and death in anyone.

**13. Children cannot get COVID-19:**

From medical point of view, anyone, of any age, can be infected by corona virus. During the first wave of covid in India as well as in other countries children were rarely affected. Research from May, 2020 suggests that children were less prone to be affected by corona virus, probably not more than 1 in 1,000 children. But in the second wave the scenario was changed in such an extent that UNICEF expressed concern for Indian children.

**14. Coronavirus can be spread from urine and feces:**

In general, the viruses those were detected in urine or feces are not infectious to others. The acidic conditions of our stomach denature or destroy the virus. No research-based evidence is there which strongly concludes that SARS-CoV-2 is present in urine or feces.

**15. Chlorine spray on the skin kills virus:**

Applying chlorine to the skin is very harmful, especially for eyes and mouth. This chemical can be used to disinfect surfaces, but people should not use them on their bodies.

**16. Every COVID-19 affected will die:**

This is false. According to the report of the World Health Organisation, around 80% of COVID-19 affected did not need any special treatment or hospitalisation. Only mild symptoms like fever, cough, sore throat, and may be sometimes shortness of breath could be observed. Also, many people were being affected with no symptoms.

**17. Pets spread corona:**

There were lots of debates regarding this but no evidence was found that showed a significant role of animals in spreading the virus.

**18. Flu and pneumonia vaccines can protect against COVID-19**

Though the symptoms of covid-19 are similar to that of seasonal flu and it severely affects the lungs to create pneumonia but Flu and pneumonia vaccines cannot give protection against covid-19. The corona virus (SARS-CoV-2) was distinct and hence no existing vaccines could be effective against it.

**19. 5G helps in spreading corona:**

One of the myths was that 5G technology was responsible for the spread of corona virus. In a study from 2011, it was shown that bacteria can communicate via electromagnetic signals. However, most of the scientists discarded this theory. Also, in China the trial of 5G was conducted in Wuhan. This is nothing but a coincidence. Corona s also affected significantly countries with no 5G coverage.

## **20. Coronavirus can be spread in swimming pools:**

There was no such evidence which suggests that this deadly virus transmits via the water in swimming pools. Generally, the water of the swimming pools makes disinfected with chlorine which can inactivate the virus. Authorities should take extra care to clean and disinfect all facilities.

### **Why people lean towards superstitions?**

- The main reason for which some people in the society were falling towards superstition was the fear created in people's minds due to this corona situation. In this context the role of religion is also important. Several events for which proper justification was not still available, we like to think it as act of divine greatness.
- According to symbolic interactionism theory, the meaning imposed by us was considered as Social action and interaction. This meaning may or not may be the inner meaning of the object. So, corona is not the cause of the superstition. It has become a superstition as different meanings have been imposed by the individual. The myths and superstitions currently associated with corona are imposed by the human consciousness.
- In general we want to understand any situation in our own way. Superstitions are going hand to hand with the activities of people's everyday life. With the help of some common facts people learnt to recognize the things in social life. People were trying to justify their reasoning after superstitious behaviour. On the other hand, what may be su-

perstitions for someone might have become a means of gaining peace of mind for others.

- Misbelieves and superstitions were circulating over social media. Newly digitally literate people were blindly forwarding messages containing fake information without cross-check. So, social media acted as the primary carrier of superstitions in this pandemic crisis. Many people, although their intention was not to harm anyone, forward such messages to help the near ones. Making money and deriving malicious pleasure were the other reasons for spreading these misbelieves.

### **Conclusion:**

Cultural diversity of India has paved the way for various communities to nurture own beliefs

and superstitions. To fight such a pandemic, some common behavioural changes are necessary in such a diverse population. Indeed, this is a monumental task. The Government of India has directed to increase public awareness and appreciation for COVID-19 warriors. Superstitions, irrational claims and several myths over various platforms are creating obstacles in this journey. The Prime Minister of India has also urged people and organisations involved in social welfare, eliminating superstitions and misinformation about coronavirus. People are still gathering in places for worshipping or celebrating rituals violating social distancing norms. For providing crucial information about this threat to public health and government advisories on safe practices media can play a vital role in this

regard. Besides building scientific temper, the government should encourage public and private organisations to be involved in healthcare and scientific communication. To eradicate superstitions during such pandemic situations new laws and regulations should be imposed especially for the India's newly digitally literate society. In this context, it must not be forgotten that among the fundamental duties laid down

by our Constitution is Article 51A(h) which requires all citizens to develop the humanism, scientific temper, and the spirit of inquiry. This pandemic with its devastating form reminds us of this sacred duty, while rejecting misbeliefs and superstitions. However, this is true that a state of fear and helplessness has been noticed in the current Corona situation and as a result, people have become obsessed with superstitions.

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