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Ayurvedic Measures to Prevent COVID-19 Pandemic – Untapped Potential

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is a novel and a substantial challenge to the healthcare sector that was identified in Wuhan (China) and spreading from nation-to-nation via contact transmission or air droplet transmission. The rapid spread of an infection in a short period of time is known as an epidemic. If the infection further spreads from nation-to-nation and gradually in the whole world affecting a substantial number of people, it is known as a pandemic. This is relatable to the Ayurvedic concept of *Janapadodhvansa*. The word '*Janapada*' refers to community and '*Janapadodhvansa*' relates to destruction of community irrespective of *Prakruti* (body constituent), diet, vitality etc of an individual. *Ayurveda* with its primary purpose to provide healthy life and longevity can help to prevent from the exposure of such pandemic by following the *Anagatbhadha* (diseases which are yet not evident but predicted to occur in future) *Pratisheda* (management) which includes *Sthan-parityaga*, *Hitam Janapadanaam Shivanaamupsevam*, *Anjali-Namaskara* to avoid contact transmission and *Sadvrutta* (good code of conduct).

KEYWORDS

Pandemic, *COVID-19*, *Janapadodhvansa*, *AnagatBadha*, *Sathanparityaga*, *Anjali-Namaskara*, *Sadvrutta*



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INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Influenza (H1N1) as the first pandemic of the 21st century on 11th June 2009¹. The world is now facing the 2nd pandemic of 21st century i.e., COVID-19. It was identified in Wuhan (China) in December 2019. It is novel in nature and clinical trials have begun on a large scale at various laboratories worldwide but no standard treatment is yet available. Hence, prevention is the only way to combat this pandemic. Ayurveda is the science which serves humanity and is preventing from diseases since time immemorial. There are two pathogenic factors for humans i.e. general and exceptional. Exceptional pathogenic factors caused by the *Tridosha* (*Vata, Pitta and Kapha*) which are different for every person based on their *Prakruti* and the general factors, which are responsible for diseases in all the human beings irrespective of their constitution, diet, physique, vitality, habits, psychic make up, and age. These are different from each other leading to the annihilation of the community. In *Ayurvedic* texts, *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned some factors like air, water, land and time resulting in the outbreak of an epidemic which can be correlated to *Janapadodhvansa*². *Ayurveda* mentioned *Adharma Karma* (sinful act) as

the root cause of this sudden annihilation of the community. These sinful acts against ethology may be of the present life or of the previous life. They are responsible for the vitiation of these factors, which can lead to the epidemic like conditions³. As a result, contact to infection and ingestion of contaminated food leads to desolation of the community. Ageing is the progressive, universal decline first in functional reserve and then in function that occurs in organisms over time⁴. According to *Ayurveda*, age depends on the predominance of the *Dosha* in *Prakruti* (body constituent) of an individual which is also responsible for his/her diseased conditions. Three types of *Doshas* are mentioned in *Ayurveda* i.e. *Vata, Pitta, Kapha*. According to the predominance of the *doshas* in *Prakruti* (body constituents), the duration of an individual's age is mentioned. *Prakruti* with the dominancy of *Kapha Dosha* has long age duration followed by the dominancy of *Pitta dosha* and *Vata Dosha*, respectively⁵. Two types of death explained in *Ayurveda* are *Kala* (timely death) and *Akaal Mrutyu* (untimely death)⁶. The factors which are responsible for *Akaal Mrutyu* are as follows⁷: -

- Affliction with demons (virus and bacteria), poison, wind (infectious air) and fire,



- Improper availability of *Ahara* (food) and *Prateekara* (treatment)

If an individual is afflicted with diseases like fever mentioned in *Janapadodhvansa* and not getting proper treatment, the life of that individual ends causing *Akaal Mrutyu* (untimely death) ⁷. *Janapadodhvansa* (sudden desolation of the community) is responsible for *Akaal Mrutyu* (untimely death) of the population.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1. A critical review of *Janapadodhvansa* with covid-19 pandemic.
2. To establish the role of *Sadvrutta* in preventing covid-19.

MATERIALS

Various Ayurvedic texts, journals related to covid-19 are considered to review the concept.

❖ A NOVEL VIRUS:- COVID-19

Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was identified in the wake of a sudden up rise in the number of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China last year in December 2019. The number of cases gradually went up and started spreading to different parts of the world resulting in a pandemic and it was officially named by the World Health Organization (WHO) as Coronavirus

Disease 2019 (COVID-19)⁸. World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as pandemic as it is spreading all over the globe including 190 countries with 334,981 confirmed cases and 14,652 death among them ⁹. Coronavirus is an enveloped, positive single-strand RNA virus. It belongs to the Orthocoronavirinae subfamily, as the name, with the characteristic “crown-like” spikes on their surfaces ¹⁰. Corona virus (CoV) is a large family of viruses that cause symptoms ranging from common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV).

- Symptoms of covid-19

Table 1.1 (Symptoms of COVID-19)

S.no.	Common signs of infection	In more severe cases
1.	Fever	Pneumonia
2.	Cough	Severe acute respiratory syndrome
3.	Shortness of breath	Kidney failure
4.	Difficulty in breathing	Death

There is no standard medicine or vaccines available yet. WHO issued a standard recommendation for the prevention of COVID-19 like washing your hands frequently, maintaining social distance, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, practice respiratory hygiene, use masks etc¹¹.



❖ PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

Whole world is looking for the prevention of chronic diseases or non-communicable diseases. Although the burden of infectious diseases like COVID-19 is a substantial challenge to the world. In this scenario, *Ayurveda*, the “science of life” plays an important role via its primary purpose which is to preserve the health of a healthy individual and cure the diseased ones¹². *Ayurveda* is not only the science of healing but it concentrates on what is necessary to lead a healthy life as well. There is no evidence for treating the current pandemic but *Ayurveda* has mentioned about diet, behavior, rules and regulations under the concept of *Sadvrutta* (code of conduct) that can prevent from such pandemic like conditions. The factors which are thought to be responsible for desolation of community aggravated by unrighteous acts, execration, demons (virus or bacteria), indignity, and immorality affects the whole community causing *Akaal Mrutyu* (untimely death).

❖ ETIOLOGICAL FACTORS IN AYURVEDIC TEXTS

COVID-19 (caused by 2019-nCoV infection) was classified as a fifth-category notifiable communicable disease in Taiwan on January 15, 2020¹³. Infectious or communicable disease can be defined as an illness caused by another living agent, or its

products, that can spread from one person to another¹⁴. These communicable diseases can lead to small isolated outbreaks, epidemics and even full-scale pandemics. An epidemic or a pandemic can occur when several types of infective agents (like viruses) and population (host) create an ideal situation for the spread. Contact transmission, lack of awareness, unavailability of proper treatment, poor hygiene, etc., can lead to conditions that allow easy transmission. COVID-19 is spreading from person to person and from nation to nation and getting aggravated by these factors. In Ayurvedic texts, these communicable diseases are classified as *Aupsargika Rogas* – caused by exposure to the person having infectious conditions like fever¹⁵. The mode of transmission of these *Aupsargika Roga* are as follows¹⁶ -

- ***Prasangada*** – Sexual intercourse with the infected one
- ***Gatra-Sparshnaad*** – By touching the infected person
- ***Niswashvada*** – By contaminated breath
- ***Sahabhajnata*** – By sharing food with infected person
- ***Saha-Shyaya-Asana-Vastra-Mala-Anulepnaata*** – By sharing chairs and beds, wearing apparels, garlands and unguents used by the infected one.



These etiological factors completely correlate with the factors that are responsible for the spread of COVID-19, a full-scale pandemic.

❖ SYMPTOMS OF EPIDEMIC IN AYURVEDIC TEXTS

Every individual has his own unique *Prakruti* (body constitution) on which the severity of his diseased condition depends. When the common primary resources like air, water, land and season (time) become vitiated then general symptoms of cough, breathing difficulties, vomiting, rhinitis, headache, fever occur. This breaks down the living culture of that area¹⁷.

❖ PATHOGENESIS

An epidemic is the rapid spread of a disease in a large number of people within a short period of time¹⁸. This epidemic can be localized to one location or can spread from nation-to-nation affecting substantial number of people and leading to pandemic. The factors that are responsible for converting an epidemic to pandemic are airborne transmission, arthropods transmission, biological transmission, contact transmission, developmental transmission and propagative transmission¹⁸. COVID-19 also spreads through contact transmission from closed ones. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by

touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, this thought to be the way of spread of virus¹⁹. To stop the condition of *Anagatbadha* (diseases which are yet not evident but predicted to occur in future)²⁰, *Sadvrutta* (code of conduct), *Dincharaya* (day routine), *Ratricharya* (night routine), *Ritucharaya* (seasonal routine) are helpful.

❖ LINE OF TREATMENT OF EPIDEMIC IN AYURVEDA

However, it's not easy to stop the conditions like epidemic or pandemic but some preventive measures can be helpful to decrease the adverse effects. In ancient texts, the seers had mentioned that before the epidemic condition arises, we should collect the essential drugs for safety purpose. As the climatic changes take place, the potential of the drugs to cure the symptoms during an epidemic decrease. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, administering the drugs of lower potency also lead to annihilation of community which is known as *Marak* (epidemic)²¹.

• Some curative and preventive measures mentioned in *Ayurveda*: -

1. *Sthaan-parityaga* (migration) - When the epidemic conditions worsen, people from the affected area should



migrate to the healthy or unaffected area or isolate themselves²¹.

2. **Panchkarma** – Five elimination therapies of elevated *Doshas* are considered the best in curing the effect of epidemic²².

3. Proper use of **Rasayana Chikitsa** (rejuvenation treatment) is recommended and maintenance of the body temperament by means of medicinal herbs collected before the onset of epidemic is recommended²².

4. Truthfulness, compassion for living beings, charity, sacrifices, worship of God²².

5. **Prashamano Guptiraatmna** - Tranquility, prophylactic protection of oneself and seeking one's own good²².

6. **Hitam Janapadanaam Shivanaamupsevam** - Residing in a non-affected country²².

7. Service to those observing **Brahmacharya** (celibacy) and following **Brahmacharya** to avoid close contact²².

8. **Sakthaam dharmshastranaam** - Discussion of religious scriptures, constant association with the righteous²².

9. Following the **Sadvrutta** (code of conduct)²² etc.

10. **Anjali-Namaskar** – Addressing people by joining hands²³ instead of shaking hands or by hugging each other.

❖ ROLE OF SADVRUTTA IN PREVENTION OF PANDEMIC COVID-19

The term *Sadvrutta* is made from “*Sad*” meaning good and “*Vrutta*” meaning conduct²⁴. The term *Sadvrutta* itself suggests to perform good conduct or behavior. In ancient period, *Sadvrutta* was practiced by mankind to fulfill two objectives – maintenance of good health and to get control over sensory organs²⁵. The reason behind all the diseased conditions are *Asathmyaindriyarthanyog* (unwholesome union of all the sensory organs), *Pragyapradha* (intellectual errors) and *Parinaam* (seasonal effect)²⁶. *Sadvrutta* is important to achieve control over sense organs. The intellectual errors i.e. *Pragyapradha* is the main cause of *Adharma Karma* (sinful acts) which leads to sudden destruction of the community²⁷. We should follow *Sadvrutta* to stop conditions like *Janpadodhwans* (epidemic). COVID-19 is an infectious disease. It may be transmitted when an infected person suffering from the disease sneezes or coughs and air droplets spread in the air or fall on the ground and nearby surfaces. If another person present in the vicinity happens to inhale the droplets or touch the contaminated surfaces and then touches his face, eyes or mouth, he can acquire the



infection. By following *Sadvrutta* measures we can avoid these transmissions in the following ways: -

1. Bathe twice a day and clean his excretory passages and feet frequently – So that the infectious droplets get cleared off from the body ²⁸.
2. Always wear untorn clothes – So that direct contact of the virus with the skin is prevented ²⁸.
3. Adopt auspicious conduct – To avoid sinful acts which is the main reason for community destruction in Ayurvedic texts ²⁸.
4. Avoid places with dirty clothes, bones, thorns, impure articles, hair, chaff, garbage, ash, and skull – By adopting these measures we can prevent ourselves from spreading transmission ²⁸.
5. Do not laugh loudly – to avoid expulsion of droplets out of our mouths on the ground or in the air ²⁹.
6. Should not yawn, sneeze and laugh without covering his mouth – so as to prevent droplet transmission ²⁹.
7. Should not scrap the earth with his nails – thereby avoiding direct contact with the virus which may be present on surfaces ²⁹.
8. Do not touch the head with dirty clothes nor should strike at hair tips and should wear fresh clothes after bathing – Dirty clothes may have droplets containing

virus. Avoid touching the head so as to prevent the respiratory passages from acquiring infection. Wearing new clothes after bath might protect from the previously embedded viruses or bacteria ²⁹.

9. Should not take contaminated and stale meal – It may contain virus. Hence, one should take only freshly prepared meals ³⁰.
10. Should not eat without applying fragrance and garland, without washing hands, feet and face, without cleaning the mouth – Cleaning the extremities before eating prevents the virus from entering into our respiratory or gastro-intestinal tract ³⁰.
11. One should not spit out sputum, pass feces and urine in front of the wind, fire, water, the moon, the sun, Brahmins and the preceptors – By doing this we prevent other people from getting infected as our excreta may have infectious material which may infect others through air and water contamination ³¹.
12. One should not urinate on the road, in crowded (public) places– There are chances that infection can be transmitted via excretory products which may infect community residing in that area ³¹.
13. One should not let out oral or nasal excreta at the time of recitation of mantras, oblation, studies, and sacrifice, religious or auspicious acts – It may prevent us for doing *Adharma Karma* (sinful acts) which



is the root cause for *Janapadodhvansa* (destruction of community)³¹.

14. Drinking lukewarm Water – *Acharya Charak* mentioned lukewarm water in the treatment of fever during Epidemic conditions³². Properties of luke warm water are:- It stimulates hunger, helps in digestion, beneficial for throat, easy to digest, clears the bladder, relieves in hiccups and flatulence, suppresses vitiated *Vata-Kapha*, suppresses the newly developed fever, cough, accumulation of undigested material, rhinitis, dyspnea or difficulty in breathing, pleural pain³³. with these properties, it can help to cure and prevent the symptoms during epidemic conditions.

DISCUSSION

In most of the ancient texts, *Acharyas* preach for humanity, which symbolizes that *Ayurveda* is not merely the science of life, but also the science of longevity. The science of *Ayurveda* is deliberated on the purpose of achieving long life and health. So as to achieve good health, the best source is to strive for attainment of *Purushartha Chatustya* (the four primary instincts of human beings)- *Dharma* (virtue), *Artha* (wealth), *Kaam* (amorousness) and *Moksha* (emancipation). Diseases prevent us from

attaining the *Purushartha Chatustya*^[34]. Diseases are a great obstacle for human beings and the means for their amelioration are to be found³⁴. This is what we are witnessing right now as COVID-19, which is the greatest obstacle for the humanity. COVID-19 is a pandemic condition involving more than 190 countries worldwide and increasing progressively. *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned similar conditions in *Janapadodhvansa*, which literally means sudden destruction of the community, irrespective of their body constituent, diet, physique, vitality etc. These conditions can be transmitted by close contact to each other resulting in community desolation. We should collect the suitable drugs and safety equipment before the conditions worsen as explained in Ayurvedic texts. No medicines have been clinically approved to cure COVID-19 infected people as of now. As we all know that the prime motive of the stakeholders of healthcare society is “Prevention Is Better Than Cure” hence for the prevention of *AnagatBadha* (COVID-19) we should follow its *Pratishedha* (prohibition) including *Dincharya*, *Ratricharya*, *Ritucharya* and *Sadvrutta*. The reason behind every disease is *Pragyapradha* (intellectual error) which might result in *Janapadodhvansa* (epidemics) and *Akaal Mrutu* (untimely death) too. The life of an



individual is bounded with his *Balavatprakartaya* (strong physique) and *Yathavataupcharyamanama* (wholesome regimen mentioned in *Ayurveda*). Life ends only after the completion of its normal span which is *Kala Mrutyu* (timely death). Like an axel of a good quality vehicle driven over good roads get destroyed only after its normal expiry life span³⁵. Like a cityguard protects his city and a chariot man protect his chariot, a wise man should be vigilant taking caring of his own body³⁶. By following the mentioned good code of conduct, we can make a healthy living for ourselves and for others too. The motive of *Ayurveda* is to provide *Hita Ayu* (good health) and *Sukha Ayu* (*blissfull health*) to human beings³⁷. The line of treatment of epidemics in ancient period is *Sathanparityaga* (isolation or hospitalization), *Panchkarma Chikitsa* (five elimination therapies), *Rasayana therapy* (rejuvenating therapy), doing charity – sacrifices – worships – truthfulness – prophylactic protection, *Anjali-Namaskar* (to avoid close contact and stop the contact transmission), *Hitam Janapadaupsevnam* (shifting to the safer places) including *Sadvruttapalan* (following good code of conduct). *Ahara* (food) is the most important part of life of human beings. Food, the base of life, is also responsible for maintenance and

enhancement of *Bala* (strength), *Varna* (complexion) and *Auja* (immunity or vitality)^[31]. For this we should always have meal only after washing hands, feet and mouth. One should avoid contaminated and stale meal and not eat in distorted body position so as to avoid the direct transmission of COVID-19 virus to our respiratory or digestive tract. Epidemic condition spread by many types of transmission in which contact transmission is one of the responsible factors. The spread of COVID-19 in which droplets containing virus can be transmitted by touching the nose or mouth are the root cause. Similarly, Acharya Sushruta explained about the etiological factors which can be responsible for the transmission of infectious contagious COVID-19 form person to person as *Aupsargika Roga Hetu*. For preventing the transmission, we should follow the measure of *Sadvrutta* as – should not sneeze, yawn, laugh loudly without covering our mouth, avoid spitting sputum, urinate and pass feces on roads, crowded places, in the direction of wind, water, fir etc. or during religious or auspicious acts. Major symptoms of COVID-19 mentioned in Table 1.1 are fever, cough, sore throat, breathing difficulties as explained in *Maraka* (epidemics) by *Acharya Sushruta*. All these are associated with the respiratory tract for which luke warm water is helpful.



It is also helpful in newly developed fever, cough, rhinitis and beneficial for throat and dyspnea.

CONCLUSION

Many trials have been conducted to find a cure of COVID - 19 pandemic but no standard medicines or vaccines are available yet. To prevent from this situation, *Ayurveda* plays an important role by suggesting to follow the *Sadvrutata* (good code of conduct), avoiding contaminated and stale meal, doing *Anjali-Namaskar* instead of showing gratitude by shaking hands or hugging each other so as to avoid close contact. *Sthanparityaga* (migration) or *Hitam Janapadanamupsevam* (shifting towards non-infectious place) should be adopted in such a situation to minimize the spread of infection. Consumption of lukewarm water as much as possible as indicated in conditions like epidemics. Provide *Hita* (good) and *Sukha* (blissful) life to everyone making yourself aware. By adopting all these means we can attain the primary objective of *Ayurveda* i.e. prevent the health of a healthy person and cure the diseased one.

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