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# THE SPIRITUAL BELIEF TO PROTECT FROM COVID-19: THE CASE STUDY OF INDIA

The 2019 coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has presented unprecedented health challenges, resulting in complete restrictions on lives across the world. This research assesses spiritual care as an essential component of comprehensive health management, particularly in terms of adaptation, acceptance of illness, suffering, and, ultimately, of death. This article provides information on the need to provide spiritual care as a means of coping and well-being for families, patients, and health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research examined how the Indian people understood the Indian Prime Minister's announcement to adopt a ritual belief in this pandemic. The research questions examine how the pandemic has disrupted religious observances and how people changed their performance of ritual work in fear of the coronavirus. The authors found that, while people were spiritually motivated by the Prime Minister's appeal, the mass vaccination program was the solution to the pandemic, and was the primary factor decreasing new cases.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Spirituality and Belief, India, Political and Cultural, Right Wing, Pandemic.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality has been a foundation of all people groups since the beginning of recorded history. It is an integral part of the quality of life, health and well-being of both the general population and those affected by the disease. In recent years, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has gone global, affecting nearly every country, society and health system. It disrupts various spheres of our social, political or economic life. It is also an intrusion into our spiritual realm. Spirituality is the foundation of human existence and is gaining more attention in global health recently. Christina Puchalski et al. (2009) define as spirituality is that aspect of humanity that refers to how individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and experience their connection with the moment, with oneself, with others, with nature and with what is important or sacred. Despite the lingering uncertainty, COVID-19 quietly offers us an opportunity to reflect on the spiritual impact it is having on the world and Indian communities (Puchalski et al., 2009). The word spirituality is derived from the main root spirit which comes to the English language from the Latin word spiritus, which means breath, courage, vigour, soul, life. Spiritus was derived from spirare to blow, breathe (Guralnik, 1984). The definition of spirituality often encapsulates concepts of meaning

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(or purpose), value (or beliefs), transcendence (beyond self), connection (with others), and becoming (life's journey). Western notions of faith in God or a supreme being; connection with self, others and nature are also issues considered when defining spirituality (Tuck, 2004). Another approach to defining spirituality adopts a more postmodern philosophy by considering each human individual's personal perceptions of "spirituality" as a self-definition. A self-definition allows an individual to incorporate personal beliefs and experiences into the formulation of a single description but raises taxonomy issues (Reed, 1992).

The virus makes the need for a positive psychological response more urgent, and the good news is that meditation and yoga are good for fighting stress, which is linked to a strong immune response. the spiritual effect of the epidemic, which is ignored, although the presence of death, whether we like it or not, raises concerns about the state of our souls. Spiritual well-being is external to the daily lives of many people, and with the decline of organised religion, millions of people experience soul sickness, however, people want to define it as heart-weariness, existential fear, a nauseating feeling that nothing matters without finding a way out. The religious practices of hundreds of millions of people are undergoing profound changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic caused by a new coronavirus. The crisis has prompted many religious leaders to call on their followers not only to take safety precautions but also to embrace their spirituality to help meet the health, social and economic challenges ahead. Indian prime minister himself call the people to do ritual practice about the awareness of Covid-19. The relationship to the transcendent or the sacred has a strong influence on the beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behaviours of a people. Research has shown that families depend on their spirituality for their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Spirituality practices have been recognized as a powerful coping mechanism for coping with upsetting and traumatic events.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Spirituality is that part of theology that, starting from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of supernatural life, formulates guidelines for their growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of spiritual belief. The writings of Walter Hilton and many other mystics are classic examples of spiritual theology. For example, Hilton's primary goal is to encourage her readers at the beginning of their spiritual life, to help them move on to the more advanced steps, and ultimately to experience union with God. The perfection of the spiritual life is that which, as conceived by Hilton and other mystics, was understood as union with God. Simon Chan describes it as a related way of life in theology. Further, the analyses the understanding of spiritual growth, according to spiritual theology using experimental data and biblical (Goodrich, 2021).

The study took place in the context of spiritual belief and the COVID-19 scenario in India. The study design utilised based on primary and secondary resources to elicit texts that analyse the level of rituality that affects the political leader how to protect from COVID-19 during crises. From a variety of sources. It aims to explore and characterise the role of right-wing political leaders' speech on COVID-19 and use the tool of the Hindu religion to save human life. The use of grounded theory to critically highlight the superstitions and wrong definitions to cure this dangerous infectious disease. The study investigated how people trust bad speech made by right-wing political leaders and COVID

cases were increasing in the thousands in a day. The grounded method of dimensional investigation, as interpreted by Kools, McCarthy, Durham and Robrecht (1996) and Cunningham (2005) to available stories. This method was developed to consider data from a point of view where it would be possible to use experience and expertise to identify salient elements that could be considered as dimensions of analysis, establish their relationship to each other and sequence them logically (Mehl-Madrona et al., (2013).

As part of its commitment to doing theology as a tool for political mileage in the poll, a spiritual belief often makes use of partner disciplines, especially from the social sciences. This includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods. These methods, especially the qualitative, will be useful in exploring spirituality and COVID-19 from the Indian perspective responding to mystics like Hilton. For example, by using qualitative research methods, such as newspaper editorials, websites, to present political stance on coronavirus in the prism of spiritual belief mystics to present crisis in India. To prove an argument, the study includes primary data such as press releases from government officials, statements from the social scientist and noted media, journals, think tanks websites. Secondary data include articles, books, pieces of literature, magazines, reports, think tank articles, and newspaper excerpts.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of spirituality has attracted increasing attention over the past decade, as evidenced by the number of conceptual and empirical works carried out in India. Many recommend that continuous theoretical development is essential to understanding spirituality and guiding practice. Spirituality in daily life in India is like a festival celebration and gaining political mileage during the election process. It had affected the run of the policy during the 1st wave of COVID-19 and the prime minister uses the tool of Hindu faith and belief. Spirituality is defined as the majority of human experiences that seek to transcend themselves and find meaning and purpose through connection with others, nature, and/or a higher being, which may or may not involve religious structures or traditions (Buck, 2006). However, Martsolf and Mickley state that one of the greatest difficulties to nurture research and practice in this area has been the lack of conceptual clarity of the term spirituality (Berry, 2005). They analysed that those who conduct research on spirituality from a theoretical point of view should consider the differences in worldview in theories and models. Continued development of the theory was recommended as essential to further understanding spirituality and belief in the practice of everyday life. Berry (2005) noted that there are methodological difficulties with existing studies on the construction of measurement, design, and analysis of spirituality issues. (Reimer-Kirkham et al) raise the question of whether the current trend in the literature and research to separate the concepts of religiosity from spirituality is consistent with the understanding of both peoples and ruling party leaders spiritually motivated speech (Reimer-Kirkham, 2004). They warn that postmodern constructions of spirituality may inadvertently decontextualise the experience of non-Western peoples. Mahlungulu and Uys, analysing the concept of spirituality in a South African context, used a grounded theory methodology with 56 informants. In India, there is also a need to expand the grounded theory to understand the assimilation of belief through religious faith to protect themselves from the COVID-19 pandemic (Mahlungulu, Uys, 2004).

E. Erenchinova et al. write that spiritual values are creative and constructive mechanisms that work to stabilise society, to avoid its destruction, it is their regularity., kindness, Sympathy, compassion and caring are some of those spiritual values that drive humanity in its base form. Consideration wishes to separate other beings from suffering. These values are often overshadowed by our intellectual vision and strive for practical wisdom, but underneath lies a component of love and care for others (Erenchinova, Proudchenko, 2018). Human beings tend to turn to prayer in times of crisis. Inappropriately, religious places, including mosques, churches or temples, are locked. Weekly Friday prayers are banned, masses suspended and rituals reduced. People can become desperate: Oh my God, where do we go now? Getting through these trying times will take a lot of spiritual invention. In this situation, people are encouraged to stay back, pray from home, and use the liturgical and prayer resources provided. According to Addiss, the global health incorporate a spirit of interdependence and recognizes the need for global cooperation to address these issues. Social distancing can raise concerns about the cohesion of our society, our community or our family, but is crucial to stop the spread. The essence of these blocks is also to protect other citizens (especially older ones), who are at the highest risk, as well as people with underlying health problems. COVID-19 has awakened the spirit of unity and interdependence in the health systems of several countries and has promoted and coordinated decisions and actions at the national, state/provincial and local levels. This requires global cooperation: a unified action in the interest of the health of the general population and, as the WHO director himself said from the beginning, solidarity is the key to overcoming COVID-19. Young and old need to take care of each other, healthy people need to care about people with health problems and, of course, countries also need to take care of each other in this new global pandemic. In other arguments, there is a need for intergenerational commonality, transnational solidarity, etc. In a similar vein, the UN Secretary-General has called for a global ceasefire to focus on the material competition of our survives (Salve, 2021).

## 4. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the nation amid concerns about the spread of coronavirus on television. The world feels the need for yoga more than ever due to the coronavirus pandemic and the ancient Indian practice is helping a large number of patients around the world beat the disease and turn off all lights and lamps at 9 p.m. from 5th April 2020. Although, 1.3 billion Indians are in the same boat and right now it is important to experience this community. In our country, it is believed that the people are God, so in this hour of crisis, it is important to remind this community, Prime Minister Modi continued: Friends, in the darkness that has spread during this crisis, we must move forward relentlessly towards the light.  We must lead our people towards light and certainty. To overcome this darkness, we must show light in all directions around the residents wherever we will be there. On 5th April 2020, we must challenge this darkness. Therefore, we, 130 million Indians, should at 9 p.m. on 5th April, turn off all lights and stand at the door or balcony and light a candle, diya, torch or moving lantern for nine minutes (The Hindu, 2020).

President Ram Nath Kovind said on Sunday that practising yoga can help keep the body fit and the mind calm amid the coronavirus pandemic. Presenting his greetings on the International Day of Yoga, he said the ancient science of yoga is India's great gift to the

world. Glad to see more and more people adopting it, he tweeted and shared some of his photos in which he is seen practising yoga. Other leaders like Vice President Mr Venkaiah Naidu also emphasized that people should be in good physical and mental health to fight a united fight against the novel coronavirus, as humanity cannot allow the pandemic to take hold. the top. Yoga is a relatively low-risk, high-reward approach to improving overall health and its full potential should be harnessed," he said at an event marking International Yoga Day (The Hindu, 2020). Faith-based organizations and religious leaders have a vital role to play in the fight against the pandemic. Engaging religious leaders can address stigma and discrimination within communities and raise awareness of key measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (WHO, 2020).

Despite these inevitable horrors, much of India remains in a sort of parallel reality where COVID-19 is not a threat. The thousands of Hindu devotees continue to turn up every day for a dip in the Ganges as part of the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. Millions of worshipers have taken part in the week-long festival since the first swim day on 11th March 2021, despite clear evidence that thousands of people are testing positive for the virus after attending. Within a few days in mid-April, more than 1,600 cases were confirmed among worshippers. In March, when the second wave was already underway, heads of state from the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) published full-page ads in national newspapers telling worshipers it was 'clean' and harmless to attend the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar. Uttarakhand's Chief Minister said on 20th March 2021, No one will be arrested in the name of COVID-19 because we are confident that faith in God will overcome the fear of the virus. It is a political game to gain political mileage in the upcoming state assembly election in February, March 2022. It was only in mid-April that Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that participation in the pilgrimage should remain "symbolic" to fight the pandemic. The spiritual belief is at a high level to attention to get political benefit in the name of religious faith. The Kumbh Mela was the source of the spread of the virus. The situation had deteriorated in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand in March and April 2021. The central government of India and Uttar Pradesh did not take care to control the deities to move in Haridwar Kumbh Mela (Ayyub, 2021).

In the assembly election in West Bengal, where Modi himself campaigned. The BJP leader has advocated drinking cow urine to treat COVID-19. Vijay Chauthaiwale, head of the BJP's foreign affairs department, wrote a column calling on economists and analysts in the 'anti-Modi lobby' and encouraging Indians not to reject traditional medicine including cow urine and turmeric to strengthen the immune system. This kind of bad definition is spreading to save from COVID-19, if we people drink cow urine we could save from crisis. On the occasion of the Ram Navami festival, the Prime Minister tweeted that people should follow the message of Lord Ram, the Hindu deity for protection, and behave appropriately. In this regard, the leader of the ruling party is still manipulating the mass population through sentimental talk about religion, faith during the COVID-19 crisis across the country. India is the union of many states, there are elections held for state assembly elections at the appropriate time. At present, there are assembly elections in more than five Indian states where the leaders want to gain political advantage in the elections that's why the political leader wants to gain sympathy vote through the policies of the political game. For instance, COVID-19 is a big excuse for politicians to use a tool to gain political mileage (Ayyub, 2021).

The prime minister said nothing about what his government was going to do during the crisis, but he asked people to come out onto their balconies, ring the bells and bang their

pots and pans to greet the health workers. According to the prime minister's announcement to greet the health worker people follow the guideline as well. Unsurprisingly, Narendra Modi's request was met with great enthusiasm. There were pot-banging marches, community dances and processions. Not much social distancing. In the days that followed, men jumped into barrels of holy cow dung and BJP supporters held cow urine drinking parties. Not to be outdone, many Muslim organizations have declared the Almighty to be the answer to the virus and called on the faithful to gather in mosques in numbers. During COVID-19, people have been demotivated by political and religious leaders across the country to be aware of the coronavirus. In a remote part of the countryside, people are more superstitious and lack protection against COVID-19. They are a believer in the traditional roots of Sanatan Dharma and blind follower of thousands of gods and goddesses. That is why the prime minister appealed regarding COVID-19 according to religious aspects. People believe and impress listening to ritual and religious discourses, and leaders play with people's feelings (Roy, 2020).



Figure 1. People in Mumbai applaud from balconies in a show of appreciation for health workers

Source: (aljazeera.com/gallery/2020/3/22/in-pictures-india-holds-14-hour-coronavirus-lockdown).

Shortly before 5 p.m., the cacophony in the capital, New Delhi, began with people cheering on balconies and rooftops, ringing bells, banging pots and pans, playing musical records and setting off fireworks, sending crows and parakeets running from the treetops and dogs and street cows. in the empty streets. This is India's ritual wave of frontline health

worker celebration across the country. It is a kind of celebration called in India the oldest roots of belief. Which benefits the political leader to spread propaganda to save from coronavirus. The rituality is only psychological solving not a proper cure. The people need to understand that ritual belief is not a cure for dangerous coronavirus. The only solution is modern medical treatment and must follow the suggestion of doctors to defeat the coronavirus. The ritual belief doesn't protect from the coronavirus. Moreover, Mumbai residents cheer and knock and bang utensils off their balconies to cheer on rescuers and healthcare workers on the front lines of the fight against coronavirus (Aljazeera, 2020).

Another widespread occurrence has been large religious congregations taking advantage of superstitious beliefs to defend against the scourge of the virus. One of the local ruling party leaders, who has partnered with Hindu nationalist organizations, held a cow urine party on 14th March 2020. The organization offered incense and cow urine to a demonic caricature of the virus to seek divine intervention. Those present at the party were heard proclaiming the alleged healthiness benefits of drinking holy cow urine. This has become the focus of national and international headlines, which highlights the pervasive popular belief in religious myths rather than scientific facts. Simultaneously, by prescribing cow urine, cow dung and Hindu chanting as treatment, Hindu nationalists accomplish both boundaries marking and discipline. Where the description of COVID-19 as the Chinese meets the requirements it as their pandemic, the prescription of the consumption of Hindutva symbols as remedies draws attention to accurate behaviour. Ultimately, the Hindutva's response to the pandemic attempts to strengthen its own constituency while denying the catastrophic danger that COVID-19 poses to Indian society if left unchecked (Kohli, Dhawan, 2020).

According to A. Roy, people want to vote as Hindus in Parliamentary and Assembly elections as well. Due to its close association with Hinduism, political parties use popular perception during elections to inflame religious sentiments. After the elections, the political leader never remembers his voter in five years. There is an election in India after a gap of five years between another period. During the Kumbh Mela (religious fair) in Haridwar, millions of people were sheltered to bathe in the Ganges and spread the virus to a huge level. Prime Minister Modi had tweeted that it could be an idea for the holy bath to become symbolic to fight coronavirus. He had praised the administration and the great availability of people at Haridwar Kumbh Mela. If the Prime Minister (PM) of India can directly support mass gatherings for spiritual work during the COVID-19 period, there could be no other big mistake like this (A. Roy). It is not enough to say that the government has failed. We are facing a crime against humanity (The politics of India's COVID-19 catastrophe, 29.04.2021).

The populist government have key agenda to play with emotions in the name of religion. The COVID-19 protocol had failed during Kumbh Mela in Haridwar and the Hindu pilgrimage more than four million devotees reached on the banks of the Ganges for a ritual deep at Kumbh Mela. In the lite of Indian politics and management of the COVID-19 crisis, it didn't well manage by the central government of India. Because the government and the allied political leader are teaching the mass people, coronavirus is nothing to harm man, we believe in the ancient god and goddess, so we must follow our ancient values and Ayurveda. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen said the government is responsible for providing assistance to people if they are unaware of the causes of famine. Because of the famine, the people are suffering from many problems. India is known as the largest democracy in the world and it has to facilitate the press and citizens to criticise the work of

the government and how they solve the problems of peoples in crisis (Los Angeles Times, 2021).



Figure 2. Hindu worshipers take part in 'Huranga', a game played between men and women a day after Holi, the festival of colours, at the Dauji temple neighbouring the northern city of Mathura, India, on March 30, 2021

Source: (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-india-surge-idUSKBN2BV129).

During the celebration of Holi in Mathura and other places across the country, there was a huge mass gathering to celebrate the festivals. People don't care and fearlessly had done ritual work to celebrate Holi without being scared of coronavirus. The police administration couldn't take any action against the mass gathering. This is proven that the deities believe that if we perform ritual work according to ancient Hindu civilization. God will help and protect us from the COVID-19 crisis (Das, Ravikumar, 2021).

## 5. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has posed a grave threat to humanity. It is one of the biggest pandemics of the century so far and we don't know how many such pandemics await humanity in the future. The World Health Organization (WHO), which is closely monitoring the situation, has called on countries around the world to share their respective research findings so that a collective and conscientious effort can be made to fight the pandemic. In addition, the WHO has also called for the time to be for facts, science and solidarity and not for fear,

rumours or stigma. Nevertheless, we see that world leaders and community leaders are constantly engaged in defamation based on race, community and nation.

Spirituality is important in health care because it promotes stress coping strategies, promotes recovery and resilience, and prevents burnout. The best intelligence and advice in the mental realm are meditation and yoga, relaxation techniques, and daily mindfulness to find not only relaxation but also joy and comfort in your life. But it works opposite in nature because right-wing political party experiments with the ritual tool against the positivity of religion. Hindu deities are strict believers of many gods. They are very sentimental towards Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Lord Shiva and other gods. It is the weak point of the mass population in India and political parties are getting profit in the election to use this weak approach. Furthermore, how social media like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs have affected the lives of people during this crisis and there is also a scope to investigate all concern issues regarding the social media's role in COVID-19. The research analysis the rituality and political associations to each other and political leaders use the arms of religion to gain vote share in elections. Moreover, this research was limited it didn't take into account the role of hate messages in social media platforms. As far as, this research analysis there is a need to do more research work on this issue. The rituality and follower of any religion, the people of countryside need to understand the reality. If we believe in rumours and superstitions, it means that we are creating a bad situation ourselves to save from heinous disease.

Neither the ritual belief nor the political leader is aiming to gain an advantage in the polls (orate the people in the wrong way) indicating that the intentions to solve the infectious coronavirus in the country are impossible. The only scientific way of life, if people follow the medical guidelines and proper treatment could solve the COVID-19 crisis. India is an older civilisation in the world and people beliefs are linked and attached with a faith deeply at a huge level. That is why politicians are easily attached to people's spiritual emotions. During elections, right-wing political parties are easily getting an edge on other ideological base national and regional parties in elections.

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