

## **PARALLEL STUDY ON IMPACT OF 1918 PANDEMIC [H1N1 VIRUS] OR SPANISH FLU AND COVID-2019 ON INDIA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Human lives are important. Human beings are the assets of an economy. Every effort must be put to save human lives from diseases. History teaches us many lessons from various Pandemics which took so many Human lives. The 1918 Pandemic or Spanish flu can be compared to Novel Corona Virus or Covid-2019.

Many significant lessons can be learnt from 1918 Pandemic and its impact on India. This will help us to save human lives from Covid-2019 Pandemic. The Proper understanding of the impact of 1918 Pandemic will help the Government and People for adopting suitable per-cautionary measures to stop the spread of Covid-2019 Virus.

The present paper explores the impact of 1918 Pandemic and of COVID-2019 on India. The objectives of the paper are:

- 1) To understand the nature and impact of 1918 Pandemic in India.
- 2) To find out the ways and methods used to handle this Pandemic during British Rule in India.
- 3) To compare the 1918 Pandemic and COVID -2019 Pandemics in India.
- 4) To find out the measures adopted for the upliftment of the Indian economy.
- 5) To make some suggestions.

The study area covers the whole of India. The sources of information are historical research papers, print media and government publications.

The scheme of the research paper is as follows:

Part A deals with the 1918 Pandemic flu in India and how India handled this flu.

Part B deals with the parallel study of both Pandemics namely 1918 pandemic Flu or Spanish Flu and COVID-2019.

Part C covers the measures adopted to boost the Indian economy then and now and some suggestions.

### **Part A**

1918 Pandemic and Covid-2019 are similar as both are respiratory diseases and spread in same manner. The Spanish Flu was a deadly influenza and infected millions of Indian people. Corona virus disease (COVID-2019) is also infectious disease spreading through droplets of saliva or discharge from nose. The Spanish flu infected 500 million people and killed 50 million people (one thirds of world population then). Both 1918 Pandemic and COVID 2019 are global in nature.

1918 Flu Pandemic or Spanish Flu is said to begin in Kansas. It was first noticed to spread in India on May 29, 1918 with the arrival of a ship carrying Indian Troops at the shores of Bombay. It spread when troops travelled across globe. The Indian economy under British Colonial Rule was already suffering due to First World War. This flu killed 50 to 100 million people around the globe and 12 to 13 million (some studies claim to be 18 million) people in India, 6 % of total Population. Soon it got spread in each town and village of India.

Some highlights of the 1918 Pandemic in India are as under.

\*Unpreparedness of British India in 1918

India under British rule was not prepared to face this Pandemic. In the initial stages, it was not noticed properly. During September 1918, Bombay became the centre of Infection. Indian Newspapers reported that almost 150

to 200 bodies were brought daily at funeral ground in Bombay alone. 1918 Pandemic affected lakhs of Indian people and it spread through commercial, trade and postal routes. Had the government and people been ready for this Pandemic, most human lives could have been saved in 1918.

**\*Unequal spread of 1918 Pandemic**

Many researchers and newspaper reported that there was unequal spread of 1918 Pandemic in India. Although the spread of 1918 pandemic was in each part of British India, yet some regions were more badly affected. The northern and western regions had higher death rates (ranging from 4.5 percent to 6 percent of total population) as compared to southern and eastern regions which had 1.5 percent to 3 percent death rate. More over the spread and death toll was also unequal across various castes/religions. Low caste Indians died by 61.6 per thousand as compared to British whose death rate was 8.3 per thousand. A British report from 1919 showed that death toll was 61.6/ 1000 in low castes Hindus, 18.9/1000 among other caste Hindus and only 8.3/1000 among Europeans in India. Lower caste Hindus were generally sweepers and Scavenges. 1918 Pandemic had gender-bias also. Women were the worst affected. The reason of these deaths was evident and reflected in low life expectancy, ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and above all unhygienic living conditions. The British in India and other rich People lived in open clean houses and had good health and medical facilities. There was a social divide reflected in unequal impact of 1918 Pandemic in India.

**\*Role of the British Government**

The British Government did not even acknowledge the occurrence of 1918 Pandemic in India. Some studies reveal that British government issued few memorandums regarding education to public, keep fit and avoid infection and Healthy living. British Government did not make speedy efforts, rather waited that things might get well. There was no proper Public Health System for the people. Government made necessary rules under Epidemic Diseases Act 1897. Affordable Indian ayurvedic medical treatment was not allowed. The private hospitals were costly and were caste –based. The Non-action responses of the government, First World War and drought in 1918 which caused famines all over the country increased the miseries and sorrows of the people. Moreover, the food and medical supplies were sent to military camps causing shortage of essential food and medicines. The Impact of the 1918 Pandemic was severe. The poor were badly hit. They died of starvation. There were no arrangements for cremation also.

**LESSONS FROM 1918 PANDEMIC OR SPANISH FLU IN INDIA**

The Indian experiences of 1918 Pandemic are shocking and dreadful. It was respiratory influenza which killed millions of people and it lasted for 2 years. There were multiple waves of infections. Many mistakes were made during 1918 Pandemic.

1. The lack of awareness about 1918 Pandemic led to community spread of this flu.
2. There was panic, anxiety, fear and ignorance.
3. There was unwillingness of the British Government to make people aware of the simple lowcost methods like wearing masks, Hygiene, Hand washing, self – quarantine and physical distancing.
4. A good public Health System was absent. Health and Medical staff was sent for military due to war.
5. The poor, illiterate and lower sections of the society were badly affected. Such people are significant part of the socio – economic system.

**Therefore, during any Pandemic, it is the best way that sooner the government and people react and understand the pandemic and its severity, better it is for the human lives.**

**Part B**

In 1918, India was under British rule while at present day Indian economy is the largest democracy in the world. Indian economy is liberalized and globalized economy. Indian economy has experienced structural changes in economic and social terms. It has higher level of the development reflected in higher GDP, higher per capita income, better medical facilities, better technological development, higher literacy rates, better longevity and much more. After 100 years, the total Population is now 138 crores as on Jan 1, 2020, with higher levels of employment, higher standards of living, consumption and urbanization. Although there are various

challenges on the economic and social fronts like gender-bias and social-divide, yet the economy and its people are capable of understanding and fighting against these challenges.

\*The important factor is that the attitude and outlook of people has widened towards such issues and challenges.

In 1918, there was British rule in India. This was the time of First World War. Government did not have any development plans for the people. There was development of railways, canals and construction of roads. The First World War caused collapse of global trade. The situation was further complicated with the problem of 1918 Pandemic. There was rise in demand for goods in India and abroad but supply shortage arose due to disruption of ships. This led to rise in prices of industrial good which benefitted Indian industry. There was rise in farm prices also. This was also the time of shift in government policy. So Industrial Report was submitted in 1918 for providing the state support for industrial growth.

It is to be noted that these policy changes were not the result of 1918 Pandemic. Many research studies like Max Reyes in Blomberg shows that lockdown measures may slow down the economy initially but later on these measures help in better economic growth and give boost to economy. The cities and regions which adopted Non-Pharmaceutical Health Interventions experienced lesser negative effects but those which kept unlocked without any precautions (example of San Francisco during Spanish flu in 1918 with anti-mask Movement) suffered losses of human lives and economic losses as well. In India, people were not made aware regarding these NPI measures by the British government while in many countries, governments were popularizing NPI measures as an effective tool to save the lives of people.

\*Therefore, NPI proved to be effective measure during 1918 flu and for economic growth in the medium and long term. Some studies in US and Europe show that those cities/regions which adopted lockdown measures had low mortality rates and experienced higher employment Growth after the 1918 Pandemic.

At present in India, the cases of COVID-2019 are on the rise. As on June 22, 2020, total cases in India are 440 thousands, recovered cases are 248 thousand and total COVID-2019 deaths are 14011. India has not being able to flatten the curve. The levels of unemployment and poverty are mounting. At the same time, the carelessness of people, towards this virus is visible.

Various researchers like Chander.S., Eva Kassen, Noor, Goran, K. found that density of population play significant role. Higher density has greater probability of social interactions leading to easy transmission of infections. Therefore more NPI measures and lockdown are needed in highly dense areas like Delhi, Gurugram, Mumbai and other such cities during Covid-2019. Some states are more affected. Nearly 70 percent of COVID-2019 cases are from five states. Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh occupy first, second, third, fourth and fifth number respectively accounting for three lakhs cases out of 4.4 lakhs cases as on June 22, 2020.

Today we have higher awareness level through social Media, Electronic and Print Media, The democratic government of India is taking care of the masses through awareness Campaigns, 4 lock downs (March 25, 2020 to May 31, 2020) and financial packages for migrant laborers, MSMEs, farmers etc.

The present day India is handling the COVID-2019 Pandemic in the best possible and proactive manner. An effective awareness campaign has been launched. Honorable Prime Minister himself addressed the people of India directly many times on electronic media, social media and on radio network. PM announced lockdowns in four phases till May 31, 2020 and the phase one of unlock has already started. Ministry of Health and family welfare regularly give advisory guidelines and updates on COVID-2019 regarding the travel guide, visa restrictions, proper behaviours, managing health care workers, social behaviours etc. Ministry of Ayush and ICMR have issued broader guidelines. Ayush Ministry popularized the use of Ayurveda Unani Siddha and Homeopathy systems. It issued training resumes for Covid-2019 management for field surveillance Field supervision, clinical Management also.

The government is keeping a proper track of all the cases. AarogyaSetu App has been launched. The NSS, NCC and other such organizations have been involved. The NPI measures like wearing of masks, hand washing, hygiene and sanitation, herbal recipes by Ministry of Ayush have been extensively popularized. Above all, PM CARES Fund (Prime minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief Fund) has been set up to help the people affected due to COVID-2019. During 1918 Pandemic, no awareness campaign was started by British Government. During Covid-2019 Pandemic awareness campaigns home between many educational institutions, social media

and electronic media. Ministry of Ayush issued Health and hygiene guidelines on regular basis. Despite the higher level of Awareness amongst the People and effective steps by the Government for fighting against Covid-2019 and adoption of suitable economic stimulus many challenges are there.

### Part C

This section explores the measures which India adopted to boost its economy during and after the 1918 Pandemic and COVID 2019 Pandemic. Economic development is a function of human development. Growth and skill formation of human resources help in acceleration of the rate of economic development. There is positive relation between the two.

Economic Development = f (Human Development)

Human development = f (education, health, skill formation)

The soul of economic development and growth lies in raising the welfare of the masses. Therefore, it is essential that all the threats like Pandemics must be handled in such a manner which saves human lives and revives the economy as well. We must understand that the market economies based on the principles of profitability and competition fail to understand the value of human lives because the market can't measure the fear, Panic, anxiety, emotions of human beings due to such Pandemics. This stresses the need of the role of the government/state to handle such Pandemics.

The Economic history shows that there are little or no studies regarding the impact of 1918 Pandemic on population and labours shocks and their resultant effects on economic growth. During 1918 Pandemic, the problem of migrant laborers was there. They moved to their villages and increased the Spread of flu. The development of railways also contributed in transmitting the flu. The economic status of the people and of the economy was worst hit.

India is one of the most affected nations by COVID-2019. The strict lockdown might have slowed down the death tolls but the economy is badly affected. As per World Bank estimate, the expected growth rate in India during 2020-21 is 2.8%. 400 million people especially in the informal sector have been pushed towards poverty and unemployment due to COVID-2019 Pandemic. Investment bank Goldman Sachs estimated 45 percent economic decline in India (CNBC June 22, 2020).

For boosting the economy, British Government took little measures while present democratic Government of India initiated many measures. To give stimulus to the Indian economy measures have been undertaken. Under banking measures, RBI and the government aimed to provide cheaper cash flows, freezing of loans repayment deferrals, special windows and other such measures for increasing the injection of money into the economy. Various Relief measures by RBI on March 27, 2020 & April 17, 2020 for raising liquidity and boost to MSME sector, relief for NBFCs and power utilities, Real Estate sector have been adopted. Various employment related measures like state compensation schemes have been undertaken. Essential step for goods- supplies like Pradhan Mantri Kisan Anna Yojna through PDS is being implemented. Direct Benefits transfers measures for 86.9 million farmers, MGNREGS Workers, 50 million senior citizens and 200 million women Jan Dhan account holders, 83 million women under Ujjwala Scheme, and medical insurance cover of health workers, have been announced. Various social security measures for organized sector employees have been undertaken. Besides government announced ban on exports of surgical masks & disposable masks, other essential medicines and increased the import of medical apparatus equipment, kits masks by giving exemption from custom duty and health cess. Government of India planned measures to attract foreign investments.

A large number of measures have been adopted by Government of India during COVID-2019 to give a boost to the Indian economy. Government has made announcements of financial packages for the migrant workers, poorer sections, street vendors and small farmers. Structural reforms have been initiated in 8 sectors like coal, minerals, defense production, social infrastructure, space and atomic energy. 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' Scheme has been announced. There are other various post- pandemic plans to recover the Indian economy. PM CARES Fund (Prime minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief Fund) and Economic Response Task Force has been set up to handle the economic issues. Under National Food Security Act (NFSA), One Nation one Ration Card, 17 States are under the Integrated Management of P.D.S. Some steps to boost the exports of Indian herbs like saffron, chillies and alike have been announced as a revival measure for the food industry in India.

In short, policy makers and the government is working hand during the hard times of covid-2019 in India.

According to Priyana Kishore, Head, India and Southeast Asia Economics that fiscal response by the government has been very less. There has been fall in activities and production, in agricultural sector, industrial sector and Service sector including trade, hotels, transport, tourism etc. As per the estimate, the index of industrial production fell by 55 percent due to lockdown. There is a large army of unemployed migrant workers on the roads. Covid-2019 Outbreak has exposed the vulnerable condition of migrant Labors in India and also of workers of informal sectors of the Indian economy.

A lot has been done by the government and other organizations with regard to COVID-2019 but there are many challenges in front of Indian economy.

1. Upgrading the public health system of the economy and making it affordable and available for the masses. This requires a continuous flow of investments.
2. The role of the State in each economic and social need to be redefined. This will build the trust of the masses in the government.
3. Various stake holders of the economy like government, private sector producers, consumers, and investors must be identified and they must understand their responsibilities towards the economy.
4. The proper and fruitful functioning of hospitals and health centers has to be monitored
5. Indian economy needs a real boost far accelerating the levels of employment and growth of each sector of the economy.

## SUGGESTIONS

The pressure to unlock for the growth of businesses, trade, services and manufacturing sectors (which might act as a boost to the economy) has to be handled with almost care.

1. Tax an unearned Income like rental incomes, inherited Property and alike can be imposed for resource generations.
2. Identification of the stake holders of the economy like people, government, health workers, private sector- businesses, trade, farmers, labour class. It is essential for categorizing their respective roles and responsibilities during and after COVID -2019.
3. Financial / final stimulus can be provided by the government in terms of direct subsidies as wage subsidy or business subsidy and financial packages for boosting the economy & its various sectors & subsectors.
4. Facilitating equal opportunities of medical access is as important as financial boost for the economy.
5. Restricting the movements of people will help to stop the COVID – 2019 transmission which will further save money spent on the treatment of the corona patients.
6. Adopting of low cost remedies called Non-Pharmaceutical Health Intervention(NPI) will undoubtedly save the resources of the economy. Use of the masks, Hand washing, Physical distancing, Personal hygiene, use of Ayurvedic herbs to boost immunity are simple yet significant measures which must be followed by each Indian. This will help to boost the economy in an indirect way.

In short, learning from these mistakes /short comings, Indians must fight COVID-19 and must save the precious lives.

1. India must focus on a good and effective Public Health System because there are linkage between health, environment and development
2. Awareness Movements regarding personal Hygiene and sanitation.
3. Awareness about low cost ayurvedic remedies or treatment.
4. Execution of effective Lockdowns wherever necessary.
5. Implementing Physical Distancing during lockdowns and during the unlock phases.

6. Use of NPI (Non-Pharmaceutical health Interventions).
7. Realizing the importance of clean environment.
8. The key to success of all the efforts lies in the people's participation.
9. The local level bodies like panchayats, municipal corporations can Play a significant role in dealing with issues of the people

These valuable lessons will help in India's preparedness in psychological, social and medical terms. Future plans and policies must focus on development of infrastructure for green environment, public health system and small sectors for sustainable development and generation of employment. The social sectors and economic sectors have to be taken care of simultaneously and everything can't be left on market forces.

Summarizing this parallel study on 1918 Pandemic and COVID– 2019 Pandemic, it can be said that good leadership along with people's participation are the soul of a nation's strength to face any Challenge.

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