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IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AMONG THE MUSLIMS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Abstract

The study pertains to appraise the impact of corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the religious beliefs among Muslims in the state of J&K-India. While evaluating normative questions such as human desires, prejudices, customs, beliefs & faiths¹, etc. A radical approach was used. To maintain safety protocols of COVID-19 recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) random sampling survey was conducted using social networking medium, i.e. Whatsapp, www.facebook.com and telephonic conversation to gauge the desired information. Total views of 2450 respondents were taking into account mostly in the age group between 18-60 years. The data gathered from different places envisaged that people are more than willing to repudiate new-fashioned discipline, culture, apprenticeship, exaggerated enlightenment and unaccustomed self-reliance thesis and beliefs. In the study, we found high percentage of the total respondents i.e. 42.7 per cent admitted that this onslaught pandemic has modified their faith to tilt towards the supreme divine, while as 34.8 per cent of the respondents believed in the pre-existence of religious faith and were obliging the religious duties from the beginning. 22.8 per cent of the respondents denied such connections as they were more affirmed towards science and technology, but this number drastically changes, i.e. from 22.8 per cent to 7.5 per cent during COVID-19 pandemic as assessed during the study. Increasing trend, i.e. from 34.8 per cent to 53.9 per cent were seen among the respondents who accepted and adopted religious faiths. In the study, females were more ascertained towards their religious beliefs irrespective of age groups as compared to their counterparts. Study cleared the dilemma associated with the heat of modernization and illicit insight about old saying. The study highlighted and suggested possible measures to be taken during any pandemic disasters that will benefit and used in coping and mitigating the intensity of future such pandemics.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, Human desires, Faith, Modernization

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Introduction

We are, 'true to type' on lookers and if we ever witness or discover any transformation in culture, tradition, religion, economic stability, ideologies, etc. the reason for all this could be an execrable outbreak, warfare, bloodshed, unforeseen pandemics, passed down plagues. Well, speaking about the contemporaneous and even now pandemic, 'Novel Corona Virus' that has consternated and crippled the perseverance, stubbornness, and neoteric and self-made beliefs at a full length, all over the world. In that location is a familiar behavioral trend. Whenever a catastrophe occurs, a large number of people rush to religion for relief (Dominic 2020). Religion and faith has been hit by COVID-19 in different ways. Enormous impediments have been implemented globally. At the heat of the moment (during the massive outbreak), the theists were in conflict with their authorities owing the gatherings must be limited to triumph over the global outbreak (Kowalczyk et al. 2021). Muslims do pray five times a day and during this procedure, they perform an ablution followed by ritual cleaning from head to toe with clean and pure water. Now, present day doctors are recommending the same thing that was provided to us is 1400 years ago. The whole idea and function of the above mentioned slogan was to create awareness and educate people to maintain social distancing to slow down the pace of COVID-19. Unawareness and carelessness is still causing innumerable deaths across the globe. Despite much literacy rate and education people aren't sticking to the preventive guidelines. They are just underestimating the invincible power of COVID-19.

Muslims have other old practices and during such times, medical intervention is required along with the power of prayers. Prayers are important, but seeking medical attention is important as well. The compounding of both can heal soul and disease. In times of pandemics, poor and deprived people suffer more than rich and privileged people. Thus, complimentary medical care should be given to those who aren't in a position to buy any medicines. They require considerable amount of attention to mitigate the propagation of illness among them. Maintaining equality is some other major concern for any nation whenever such a situation erupts. As we all know, it needs time to recognize any sudden disease, and after that a specific medicine could be made available for the treatment, but until then everyone needs to follow guidelines and instructions provided by the leaders to stop the viral infection. COVID-19 changed the beliefs of masses at a large pace. As cited above, Muslims are getting much closer to Allah, and they are seeking forgiveness, and a right track to walk upon.

COVID-19 is an infective disease induced by a new deadly virus (SARS COV-2). The disease was first named in December 2019 in CHINA (Wuhan). Since, its emergence it started spreading from person to person. After its rapidity, on 11th March, 2020, it was declared pandemic by W.H.O. As we know, diseases and religion have always been intimately entwined (Koenig, 2000). Differences

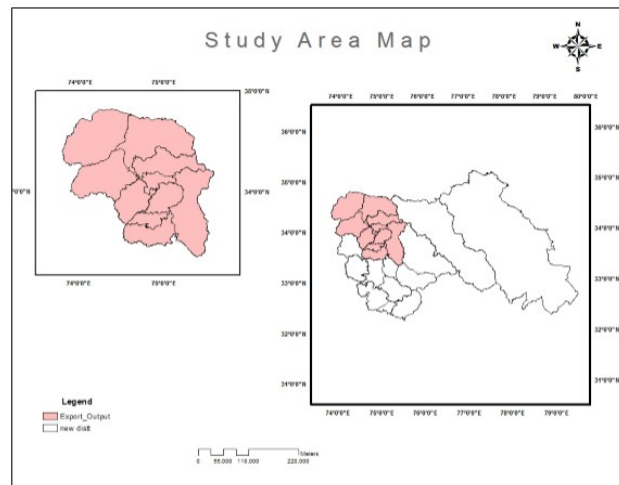
in the way religions deal with diseases have molded the epidemic over time. Deadly epidemics that swept through millennia ago played an intimate role in the risk of modern religion (Luiggi, 2011). Narrated 'Amir Bin Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas: That he heard Usama bin Zaid speaking to Sa'd, saying, "Allah's Messenger (PBUH) mentioned the plague and said, 'It is a means of punishment with which some nations were punished and some of it has remained, and it appears now and then. So, whoever hears that there is an outbreak of plague in some land, he should not go to that land, and if the plague breaks out in the land where one is already present, one should not run away from that land, escaping from the plague (Al Bukhari: 6974). ISLAM has been handling pandemics for more than 1400 years and many mitigation measures were developed to combat such contagious diseases. The corona virus pandemic, which has resulted in a quantified increase in morbidity and mortality worldwide, has crippled the growth of the entire planet. The intensity of COVID-19 can be seen with its extreme extent in the vulnerability level as it engulfed all sections of the people irrespective of age, gender, caste, religion, status. This anxiety occurs more frequently in young people including both men and women. Women appreciate family values very much, tending to the needs of their loved ones and often entrust their future to God's protection (Simon, 1995). People holding out in present day modernization, oftentimes consider religion as a black balled and lousy pollution and infection. People, around the world, don't want to be bounded and confined within the laws of their respective religions. There are limitations and restrictions in every living religion and believers are supposed to follow and work under the same, particularly talking about Muslims, they have altered, and reshaped their aged and ancient religious teachings and sayings. Today, Muslims are at the brink of cooked-up and sophisticated spiritual disaster. Meanwhile, before COVID-19, people (Muslims) were much contented, whether against religious law or not. Corona virus impacts religion around the world (Chebbine 2020). The matter of fact is that the people before COVID-19 had forgotten each and everything about their religion at the scoop. Now, the closeness is clear, and apprehensible. Whenever such untreatable outbreaks occur people rush to religious places for relief, worship and repentance. The worldwide Corona Virus pandemic is not God's judgment on humanity, but God's call on people to judge what is most important to them and resolves to act accordingly from now on (Wooden 2020). In the above background, this study was carried to estimate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the religious beliefs among the residents of Kashmir valley that is mostly dominated by Islam religion with least religious diversification.

Database and Methodology

Study Area

The present study has been carved out in the Muslim dominated region of Kashmir valley, J&K- India. As per the reports JK statistical digest 2015-16 the study area having a total population of 68.8 lacs with 96.8 per cent Muslim

population. Total literacy rate of the region is 62.8 per cent, with total urban population of 31.6 per cent of urban population (Census 2011). It is rightfully called paradise on Earth. Like other states, Jammu and Kashmir also witnessed the outbreak COVID-19 and people were living with some form of fear right from the emergence. There has been a great deal of deviation among the people of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of belief and faith in God. Figure I show the areal extent of the study area that has been generated in Arc GIS 10.2 software.



Source: Generated from Arc GIS 10.2 using state shape files.

Data Collection

To infer the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Islam, with National lockdown social networking medium remains the potent tool to carry the desired information. We take random sampling survey using social networking medium, i.e. Facebook, Whatsapp, and telephonic conversation among Muslim community to evaluate the transformation of religious faiths due to COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 2.5 thousand respondents were assessed and interviewed using specific questions as farmed earlier.

Questions like:

- * Is it your perception that everything is controlled by God? (Before COVID and after COVID responses were taken into consideration): **YES OR NO**
- * Do you used to offer Salah? (Before COVID and after COVID responses were taken into consideration): **YES OR NO**
- * What made you believe/disbelieve that everything is controlled by God: **pre-existence, disasters, no comment?**

- * Which Islamic pedagogy persuaded you to believe in the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)? (Open ended question)
- * How are past plagues relevant to present plague? (Open ended question)

The information received were analyzed and tested used various statistical measures (Percentile, Mean, and standard deviation) to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on religious beliefs among Muslim population in the study area.

Sample Design

The total numbers of 2450 interviews were conducted in Jammu and Kashmir district Baramulla in which 24.97 percent respondents were from Baramulla Main Town, 21.63 percent from Uri, 20.89 percent from Sopore, 16.32 per cent from Rohama and 16.16 percent from Bomai. The total percentage of students participated in the research was 60 per cent followed by 40 percent who were having different occupations. The research respondents were mostly from 18-35 age groups (75 per cent), followed by age group of 35-45 years (12 per cent) and rest of the 13 percent respondents were aged above 45 years. Percentage of male respondents was 60 percent and of females was 40 per cent.

Results

Pointing out Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) teachings about pandemics; he suggested some pointers to defeat any outbreaks. He emphasized and stressed upon 'unnecessary travels and quarantine' and briefed everyone about the importance and implication of travel restrictions and quarantine in times of pandemics to pacify the spread of a malady and ailment. He said, "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; and if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place." (Al Bukhari: 5728)

As with the nature of every natural disaster people tend to tilt towards the supreme divine power. In the study we found mix reaction of the respondents regarding occurrence of disasters and their influence on religious beliefs. Survey conducted among the 2450 respondents with 60 per cent male respondents and 40 per cent female respondents between the age group of 18-60 years living in the study area were taken. As shown in the table I, discrete views were observed among the respondents regarding any association with disasters and their religious beliefs. Respondents were asked to express their views about their religious beliefs during two time periods (pre and during) pandemics. In the table I, it is clearly seen that high percentage of respondents 42.7 per cent of the total confessed that any natural disaster brought us closer to the supreme divine while as 34.8 per cent of the respondents believed in the

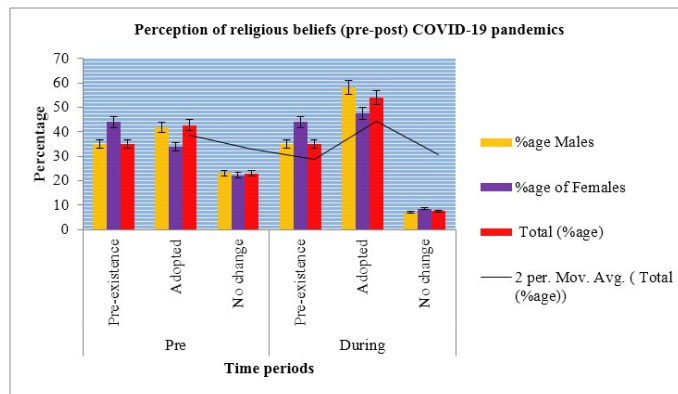
existence of supreme power and were obliging the religious duties from the beginning. 22.8 per cent of the respondents showed no such interest and denied any adopted, behavioral change during any pre-disasters, but this number drastically changes i.e. from 22.8 per cent to 7.5 per cent during COVID-19 pandemic as assessed during the study. Increasing trend from pre-post COVID-19 pandemic i.e. from 34.8 per cent to 53.9 per cent were seen among the respondents while adopting or coming closer and following religious duties more firmly and regularly. In the study it was seen that females were more ascertained towards their religious beliefs irrespective of age groups as compared to their counterparts. Figure II shows the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on religious beliefs among the respondents between two time set periods i.e. pre-during pandemic.

Table I: Existing religious beliefs (Pre & During) COVID-19 pandemic

Pre- COVID	Religious beliefs	Gender (%)		Respondents (%)
		M 60%	F 40%	Total 100%
	Total	N=1470	N= 980	N= 2450
	Pre-existence	512 (34.8)	431 (43.9)	943 (34.8)
	Adopted	617 (41.9)	331 (33.7)	1048 (42.7)
	No change	341 (23.1)	218 (22.2)	559 (22.8)
During COVID	Total	N=1470	N=980	N=2450
	Pre-existence	512 (34.8)	431 (43.9)	943 (34.8)
	Adopted	856 (58.2)	465 (47.4)	1321 (53.9)
	No change	102 (6.9)	84 (8.5)	186 (7.5)

Source: Primary survey through (Whatsapp, Facebook, and telephonic conversation); N= is the number of respondents, M= male, F= female.

Figure II: Existing religious beliefs (pre-post) COVID-19 pandemic



Conclusion

In this manner we found high percentage of the total respondents i.e. 42.7 per cent admitted that this onslaught pandemic has modified their faith to

tilt towards supreme divine, while as 34.8 per cent of the respondents believed in the pre-existence of religious faith and were obliging the religious duties from the beginning. 22.8 per cent of the respondents denied such connections as they were more affirmed towards science and technology, but this number drastically changes i.e. from 22.8 per cent to 7.5 per cent during COVID-19 pandemic as assessed during the study. Increasing trend i.e. from 34.8 per cent to 53.9 per cent was seen among the respondents who accepted and adopted religious faiths.

The basic intent of the research was to investigate or find the changes in beliefs of people. The survey also attempted to compare 'Existing Beliefs' with 'Modern Beliefs.' As far as results are concerned, people of both gender affirmed that this unsought pandemic have shown a big turnover in their religious beliefs as they tend to turn towards Allah for seeking help and protection from this dreadful pandemic which has affected humans socially, economically and mentally. By all counts, with authenticated and proven results, it is no wonder that COVID-19 heavily impacted religious beliefs across the globe. The current study witnessed huge change in the beliefs of people towards religion. It was found that large number of population came close to Almighty Allah by virtue of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. It was also found out that people start offering more prayers than before to seek refuge in Almighty from pandemics and other deadly diseases. It is well known fact that religion can assist a person to tolerate stress by generating peace, purpose and forgiveness. As already mentioned, Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim majority state and people were quite willing to return to the old beliefs and teachings as well. They felt the anger they were experiencing and began to adore God extensively. After a critical analysis, we arrived to a conclusion there are various factors responsible for such a change, and these factors are nothing, but those teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which are scientifically examined in modern times. Certainly there was wisdom, experience, and solidity in such teachings. Moreover, this teaching symbolizes that when confronting any calamity or any outbreak we must watch and restrict ourselves from going out. It implies that people should remain in isolation until its end. Prophet (PBUH) also underlined some chief and influential measure to forbid ourselves from passed down plagues like: Social Distancing, Hygiene, Medical Intervention and Complimentary Medical Care. Social Distancing and Hygiene is another preventive measure to be taken during pandemics, and this pattern was done during the time of our Prophet (PBUH). Maintaining social distance and hygiene can keep the disease away. "If there is one thing people have learned over the past several weeks, it is proper hand washing techniques and thorough hygienic practices – a hall mark of Islam. Any Muslim child can quote verbatim the tradition that states, "Cleanliness is half of the faith."

Our research was purely grounded in the reality of the impact of COVID-19 on Jammu and Kashmir and how they turned the corner to save themselves from this outrageous epidemic. We have tried many different ways to show the results and how they have tried to deal with it. Following any religious beliefs it is obligatory to follow its principals with sincerity, honesty to perceive the countless bounties of Almighty and always seek help, protection from the supreme divine.

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