
Endemics and our Medical Sciences in the Past and Present (Lessons from the Prophetic Traditions)

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 that affected much of the planet is a tragedy without precedent. In this way I will address the biographical answer and solution to this endemic, explicitly through the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) traditions. I'm discussing one of the most non-experimental blames on Islamic Traditional Sciences that they do not concentrate on catastrophic diseases like epidemics or endemics and do not fix the problem with respect to the medical sciences that actually solve the problem. I contend against this idea that in Islamic Classical Sciences explicitly Prophet Muhammad's traditions (SAAS) provide a solution to our everyday problem whether it belongs to healthcare or to other issues. In addition, this article discusses whether Islam relies on scientific discovery or on purely spiritual understandings. It also addresses the scientific, ontological and eschatological teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) towards the issue.

Key Words: Islam, Endemics, Traditional Sciences, Natural Sciences, Religions.

INTRODUCTION

We have been facing Corona Virus since the late last year and psychologically people around the world are still feeling sick because of the wide scale of news in print and electronic media as well as social media. It has worse consequences for our emotional and spiritual well-being. But on the other hand, it is ideal for those people who are confined to their homes and who fulfill their spiritual tasks by conventional means. Though on the other hand, it is ideal for those people who are confined to homes and who are satisfying their spiritual needs in the conventional way. We certainly spent our time in material outdoor pursuits. This thing created a void between Man and Allah (SWT). There was a fierce competition everywhere for the material world to be good. Allah

(SWT) created a chance for people to be able to return to their origins and not fall into a quagmire. Along with other material losses, there were many benefits for man, but for those who had to consider the problem. Killing and looting of people had decreased, pubs and casinos had closed, and many other social problems had shrunk. People have returned to their natural elegance, the relationship with their Creator and Sustainer has been revamped. Monumental social changes were taking place in the society and regaining its strength. In addition, the structure of the modern family has changed. Some people who were totally distant to their families returned to them again; they renewed their feelings, affection, and long-term relationships. Most people may have time to speak to family members on cell phones, but now they are physically involved with their families. Committing sin has decreased and religiosity has increased. At the end of the day, many people have converted to Islam. When writing these lines at 11:39pm, I still think whether this corona virus is a good omen or a bad omen. And I pray to Allah (SWT), that He shield us from all this kind of infectious disease or contagion.

A number of writers write about COVID-19. Medical and natural science experts are busy developing the vaccine to combat the pandemic and there is always a white hope. Just precautionary steps are being taken however. All powers, that is, spiritual and material, are doing their best to nip the people's sufferings in the bud. But some people continue to build the distance between the two powers and seek to persuade people to withdraw from Allah's (SWT) relationship. Recently I read the article written by Prof. Pervez Hoodbhoy in which he tried to link the COVID-19 to the Darwinian Theory. In the essay he only tried to preserve his ideological position to escape from the limits of religion. My instructor and Doctoral supervisor, Prof. Datuk, Dr. Osman Bakar, replied. He is not yet in a position to respond to his answer until this writing. I am not sure whether or not they will interrupt their endeavor. But one thing I find really obvious about is that man can't fight nature. He will have to return to his origin, whether he likes it or not.

Our Muslim intellectuals tackled all fields of knowledge, including medicine, and contributed a great deal in this area. Muslim developments ceased, however, when they were weakened politically and militarily, and eventually defeated by Tatar and Crusaders, who were stronger and more ruthless. Muslims were crippled and alienated because of it, and ultimately they relied on others. However, after the trail of destruction in all institutions, competing powers were unable to eradicate the primary sources of knowledge, i.e. the Last Revealed Knowledge (The Holy Quran) and the Holy Tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.A.S). Muslims could renovate and reinvent all their fields of knowledge, but they were unable to do so, and on the contrary they tended to other secondary sources or just to keep themselves alive without spirit, they relied on the western source of knowledge. They could not revive their knowledge by the original sources, i.e. the Quran and Sunnah. This thing led them towards the intellectual slavery.

Methods of Quranic contemplation and examinations were set aside. It is the irony of fate that, while Muslims were the torch bearer of knowledge of internal and external experiences, but they had been robbed of both. In fact, they were stripped of from intellectual constitution as well. In other words, Muslims could not be able to originate the knowledge because their intuitive approaches were locked. They just started the commentaries of existing knowledge.

Coming back to the point, Muslim played a vital role in every area of knowledge. Several pandemics and epidemics like plague occurred from time to time in human history. Plague was such an outbreak in the early and medieval times of Islam that it was called Black Death that disrupted badly and the great empires including Mamluk and the Ottoman Empire were badly shaken. If we see the sort of disease which was called Tawoun (Plague) occurred in various phases during the Ottoman Empire. This appeared during the 1466-1476, 1491-1503 and appeared again in 1600s. The plague waves reached the Ottoman Empire's capital. This was named the Black Death due to the outbreak of the above described waves of epidemics. All these epidemics during the sixteenth century halted the successes and conquests of the Ottoman Empires. Second, the epidemics of various times affected different parts of the world. Black Death started in 1346-1352, then in Egypt and Syria during 1419, 1429-30, 1438-39 and in various continents such as Asia, America and Africa during 1860-1894.

Several people wrote on the problem. Here I am addressing very important figures. Ibn Tayhribirdt (1453) wrote his book named *Al-Nujum al-Zahirah fi Muluk Misr wa-al-Qahirah* (the shining stars of the Egyptian and Syrian rulers). Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (d.1449), wrote important tract, *Bdhl al-Maun fi fadl al-ta'un* (offering small kindnesses on the virtue of the plague). Ibn al-khatib and Ibn Khatima are exalted as a scientist and a rationalist. In a time of decline Ibn al-Khatib was considered as a best Physician among Muslim. He was the one who recognized the infection and is considered his unique achievement⁽¹⁾. Often, we do not differentiate between the Contagion and Infection definition. Contagion spreads from one man to other man, usually by close interaction and Infection spreads through the atmosphere, caused by transferable agents but not directly transmitted between people, Bubonic plague is infectious but pneumonic plague is contagious⁽²⁾. Experts of the fields produced several treaties on the plague. But no further work was conducted. Under those treaties, causes of epidemics and other preventive approaches were made and debated, both material and spiritual. Recipes for preparing ointments, plasters, syrups, electuaries, unguents, fumigations have been suggested for the material methods. Moreover, herbal ingredients, animal parts, and minerals were focused. It was proposed that Armenian rock, Lemnian rock, theriac, and

⁽¹⁾ Arikha, Noga. *Passions and tempers: A history of the humours*. Noga Arikha, 2007.

⁽²⁾ NORRIS, HT. "A History of Christian-Muslim Relations. By Hugh Goddard. Pp22. Edinburgh University Press: Islamic Surveys Series, 2000." (2001): 117-119.

leezaar stone be used. In addition, for the modification of behaviors, therapeutic therapies, list of do have and don'ts were also addressed.

This is not the case today that people are not trying to define the problem, namely the unchanging Ulama, and until today there are many who are misusing religious beliefs because they have no knowledge of science⁽¹⁾. Some Orthodox gave the name as a black death to epidemics, finding it a disgrace or wrath of God. Sure there were some people who disagreed with that view. Second, there was also confusion and misinterpretation of the fact that Arabic was considered Islamic religion. Because of this, people especially non-Muslims considered these to be Islamic teachings. In real sense, Arabic was an official discourse of the Lingua Franca. Throughout Greek period, the belief of God's wrath was introduced and Hippocrates was the first Greek who considered gods as being responsible for the disease. He found nature to be the one responsible for such diseases. He said that epidemics were factors due to climate change, temperature, and air⁽²⁾. Glan extended his ideas, and then the notion of omen or misfortune moved from Greek to other nations.

Recent study, however, revealed that there was no misfortune or omen, or wrath or retribution from God. I'll send some statics here that whether it was Allah's punishment or something else. From 1348 to 1550 plague occurred in different parts of the world during the medieval period. Corrupt humors, astrological conjunctions and corrupt air or contagion were the factors that were noted. The death rate was very small until 1450 but when the triggers were not regulated then it was increased in 1500 CE and 1550CE, specifically in 1550 it was reached at its peak⁽³⁾. The numerous dynasties and empires could not scientifically counter the epidemics. Then it was the end outcome that at that time when people left themselves in the hand of destiny, Divine intervention arose. At that time that was the case. Categorically speaking, those were not Islam's teachings.

There is no doubt that, with the expansion of Islamic culture, other languages and other works on literature, architecture, philosophy, science, and medicine were translated. In particular, Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid funded and patronized the translation of Greek and Aramaic works into Arabic. Western scholars and thinkers, however, agree that Muslim scholars have been researching a great deal and developing in the field of human and compounded medicine's treatment, drug and environmental ties. While it is

⁽¹⁾ Dols, Michael W. "The second plague pandemic and its recurrences in the Middle East: 1347-1894." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient/Journal de l'histoire economique et sociale de l'Orient* (1979): 162-189.

⁽²⁾ Ahmed, Maqbul, and A. Z. Iskandar. *Science and Technology in Islam: Technology and applied sciences*. Vol. 4, no. 2. UNESCO, 2001.

⁽³⁾ Fabbri, Christiane Nockels. *Continuity and change in late medieval plague medicine: A survey of 152 plague tracts from 1348 to 1599*. Yale University, 2006.

said that Galenian theories were introduced in medical treatment according Islamic teachings, Muslim physicians also believed in and applied (miasmatic theory), which was an explanation for epidemics. Dole believed in it as well⁽¹⁾. Physician and scientists outlined specific broad preventive and therapeutic measures. Nevertheless, preventive measures and treatment of the plague was not changed until the last of the sixteenth century. Importantly, rational methods of managing the epidemics were introduced. To improve public health, Quarantine Theory and Isolation is introduced. Doctors recommended an incubation time of 32-40 days to see if it was infectious or contagious^{(2),(3)}.

First I will discuss about the general Islamic literature on medicine so that general research can be disclosed then it'll be more concentrated. The most significant scientific work is that of 'Uyun al-anba fi tabaqāt al-atibba. Various physicians contributed to the work. Actually this is a dictionary and provides a description of the work. Second, Tabaqāt al-atibba wa al-hukamā written by Sulayman ibn Hassan ibn Juljul (d.1000) and, Tarikh al-hukamā written by Ali ibn Yusuf al-Qifti (d.1248). Al-Taghribirdi wrote a book entitled al-Nujūm al-zahirah. Ibn Khallikan wrote the book Kitāb wafayāt al-'aayan, and the Mir'āt al-zamān fi ta'rikh al-a'yān by al-jauzi. Western scholars were also interested in Islamic therapeutically treatment. The names of Pierre J. Amoreux, Fredinand, John Friend, Brockelmann, are prominent. They set up bases for the study of medical treatment according Islamic teachings in the West. A Michael Dols is the most significant figure who has contributed to medicinal treatment in Islam. He translated the book of eleventh-century Egyptian physician Ibn Ridwan. In addition to Western study, the Arab scholars also wrote. Medication in Islamic viewpoint was divided into two parts: theoretical and practical. Body faculties, temperaments and spirit were explored in theoretical portion of the body. The practical part deals with the medicines, ingredients, food, and diet. Now, I analyze in depth about doctoring in Islamic view point.

Hunan Ibn Ishaq (809-873), a Persian scientist, also worked on and transcribed astrological and alchemical material. A Persian polymath, Al-Razi (860-925), authored more than 200 works on different fields such as chemistry, medicine, alchemy, and philosophy. He wrote Kitāb al-Hawi fi al-Tibb (The Detailed Book on Medicine) in twenty five volumes. This book, in 1249, was translated into other languages such as Latin. Al-Razi was the first person to give attention to infectious diseases and gave a new idea on it. He wrote in his book Kitāb fi al-Jadari wa al-Hasla (A small pox and measles monograph) that during the spring, when roses were in bloom, respiratory symptoms

⁽¹⁾ Dols, Michael W. "Medieval Islamic medicine: Ibn Riḍwān's Treatise" On the prevention of bodily ills in Egypt". (1984).

⁽²⁾ Benedictow, L. "The black death." Complete History by Olé Jörgen Benedictow, Olé (2004).

⁽³⁾ Duncan and Scott, "what was the Black Death?", 315

were affected^{(1)²(2)}. It was agreed that this research was the earliest and most significant on that subject, although for many centuries it was practiced by the Chinese and until the eighteenth century it was adopted by Europe. He was a pioneer who also worked on drug side effects⁽³⁾. Al-Razi also mentioned pneumonic plague in his book *Kitāb fi Tibb* (medicine novel) and provided innovative ideas about the epidemics.

Ali ibn al-Abbas al-Majusi (994) was a psychologist and doctor who focused on leprosy, scabies, infectious fever and consumption. He argued fever can be passed on to others. He has written *Kitāb al-Malaki* or it is known as *Kamil al-Sina al-Tibbiya*. He was the first person to condemn numerous Greek and Persian doctors and their works. He published 20 treatises, concentrating on medicine theories, medical procedures, later focusing on surgical topics, pleurisy definition, circulatory system, dietary significance, and physical exercises. In the COVID-19 age, medical scientists recommend precautionary measures and emphasize the development of the immune system, so that bacteria and viruses can be destroyed by immune response and patients can prevent themselves from becoming sick, as drugs have not yet been developed for pandemic treatment. The same was discussed by al-Mujusi in the 10th century. He indicated predisposition and called it (*Ist'dād*).

Now we are addressing another renowned figure from the history of medical knowledge and practice. Ibn e Sina (1037), the greatest polymath of the time that is called Avicenna in Europe, wrote over 40 theses covering astronomy, medicine, poetry, theology and metaphysics. He wrote primary drug book entitled *al-Qanūn fi Tibb* (the Canon of Medicine). This has been taught worldwide and has been the basis for all medical guidance at European universities⁽⁴⁾. We saw that COVID-19 emerged from China's city called Wuhan; it was disseminated due to the numerous animals and then spread the virus all over the world. Ibn e Sina addressed this sort of thing and he was the first person to note the plague disease spread on the Planet when rats and other animals run to the Earth's surface. He also mentioned that the steps were strictly hygienic, such as homes had to be perfumed with sandal, camphor and ambergris. He also listed the diet of

⁽¹⁾ Amr, Samir S., and Abdulghani Tbakhi. "Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakariya Al Razi (Rhazes): Philosopher, Physician and Alchemist." *Annals of Saudi medicine* 27, no. 4 (2007): 305-307.

⁽²⁾ U.S. National Library of Medicine, N I H, "AL-Razi, the Clinician", http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/Islamic_material

⁽³⁾ Koskella, Melanie Alexxann. *A universal approach to plague epidemics in fifteenth century Mamluk Egypt and Syria: Contemporary bias, classical Islamic medicine, and the voices of the ulama*. The University of Utah, 2014.

⁽⁴⁾ Max Meyerhof, "Science and Medicine", in *Legacy of Islam*, ed. Sir Thomas Arnold and A. Guillaume, Oxford 1931.P. 329

onion, lemon, vinegar and sardines⁽¹⁾. All the above mentioned treatments were recommended by the medical doctors in the outbreak of the COVID-19. In addition, several other physicians and scholars, such as Ibn Ridwan (1068), wrote on disease epidemics. In his book, *Risalah fi Daf' mudirr al-Abdan bi ard Misr* (on body disease prevention in Egypt), he discussed this. Within his novel, he discussed and classified the epidemics into four groups. He said that the air, the food, the water and the psychic events are responsible for the epidemics.

Ibn Rushd (1198) was a prominent physician, philosopher, and a jurist. He noted that the major ingredients of the epidemics are excessive heat, humidity and unhealthy regions. Ibn al-Nafis (1288) was a physician, wrote a commentary on Ibn e Sina's book "the canon of medicine". He noted polluted water and soil and weather are great signs of the epidemics. Ibn al-Khatib (1374), wrote treatise on the plague, too. His treatise name was *Muqniat al-Sail an al-Marad al-Hail* (the satisfaction of the questioner on the appalling illness). Ibn al-khatima (1369) wrote in his treatise:

"The result of my long experience is that is a person comes into contact with a patient, he is immediately attacked by the disease with the same symptoms. If the first patient expectorated blood, the second will do so ... if the first developed buboes, they will appear on the other in the same places. If the first had an ulcer, the second will get the same; and the second patient likewise transmits the disease.⁽²⁾"

In the discussion above the work of Greek and Islamic scientists was discussed, here I discuss prophetic medicine from the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), which is called *al-Tibb al-Nabawi* in Arabic. Before discussing prophetic medicine, allow me to mention what the Quran says about the said issue. We know that the Quran focuses on and prioritizes the sanctity (*karamah* and *hurmah*) of the life of Man, as categorically stated in the Quran:

"And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind".⁽³⁾

This also fosters a decent standard of living and prevents all kind of excessiveness. Firstly, it focuses on preventative measures by discussing good lifestyle and safe climate and balanced diet. In this way, the Quran offers holistic approach towards treatment and

⁽¹⁾ Koskella, Melanie Alexxann. A universal approach to plague epidemics in fifteenth century Mamluk Egypt and Syria: Contemporary bias, classical Islamic medicine, and the voices of the ulama. The University of Utah, 2014.

⁽²⁾ Conrad, Lawrence I. "Tā' ūn and Wabā' Conceptions of Plague and Pestilence in Early Islam." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient/Journal de l'histoire economique et sociale de l'Orient* (1982): 268-307.

⁽³⁾ The Quran, 05:32

healthcare. In addition, it offers a realistic approach to establishing Shariah's the goal-centric approach. Allah (SWT) gave the absolute treatment of any disease, as it is mentioned in the Hadith, that "there is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment"⁽¹⁾. In its commandment, the Quran categorically mentions the honey as a prescription cure. It is narrated in another Hadith that, "There is a cure for any disease, and when the cure is applied to the disease it is cured with the permission of God, the Exalted and Glorious"⁽²⁾. In another Hadith related to the problem is that, "Ubay bin Ka'b fell sick, and the Prophet (SAAS) sent a doctor to him who cauterized him on his medical arm vein"⁽³⁾. All listed references suggest that medical care is to be pursued and found, and it is the will of Allah that we should follow all current means for treating the diseases. The Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) also emphasized on the sanctity of life. At the time of Hijatul Wida, He (SAAS) said, "Verily! Your blood, property and honor are sacred to one another like the sanctity of this day of yours, in this month of yours and in this city of yours."⁽⁴⁾

Four essential points are derived from above mentioned Quranic verses and Ahadiths. First, there is the duty to sustain life and focus on the problems of nutrition and healthcare. Second, this is our obligation and if it is necessary, we may use the prohibited measure to preserve life. Third, following the imperative, if there is a condition that threatens life then prohibition may be legitimized. Fourth, for the patient and in the medication, a minimal amount of alcohol can be used to protect it. Importantly, Islam focuses on a quality of life, as the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said, "None of you should long for death because of a calamity that had befallen him, and if cannot, but long for death, then he should say, 'O Allah! Let me live as long as life is better for me, and give me death when death is better for me'⁽⁵⁾." In this hadith the word better "khare" denotes towards the holistic appraisal, and all the words in this hadith give meaning to the holistic-relativist approach. In fact, the key purpose of our Shariah is to maximize the gain and reduce the losses. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.1111) dealt with the Sharia's objective. He said, "The Shariah's very purpose is to promote people's well-being, which lies in safeguarding their faith (din), life (nafs), intellect ('aql), posterity (nasl), and property (mal). Whatever ensures that these five are safeguarded serves the public interest and is desirable, and whatever damages them is against the public interest and their elimination is desirable"⁽⁶⁾. Shatibi (d.1388) has talked about almost the same

(1) Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bin Isma'il, Al- Jsm'I Al-Sahih, No. 5678

(2) Muslim, ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi, Sahih Muslim, No. 2204

(3) Tirmidhi, Muhammad bin 'Isa, Jami' al-Tirmidhi, No. 2181.

(4) Al-Bukhari, Muhammad bin Isma'il, Al- Jsm'I Al-Sahih, No. 67

(5) Ibid, No. 6351

(6) Al-Ghazzali, A. "Ihya-Ulum-Ud-Din (The Revival of Religious Learning) Trans." Fazal ul-Karim (nd) 1 (2011): 115.

matter. He said, "The shariah's primary aim is to free man from the grasp of his own desires, so that by choice he can be the servant of Allah (SWT), even as he is His slave (in matters he has) no option⁽¹⁾." Each of the above statements demonstrates that Islam prioritizes life.

The literature on the Prophetic medicine constitutes a connection to science and medicine. Many renowned Islamic personalities, such as Ibn e Qayyim, Ibn Muflih, AL-Dhababi, wrote on Prophetic medicine. Jalal al-Din al-Suytui (1505), who was a prominent polymath, wrote about Prophetic Medicine. He wrote his book *al-Manhaj al-Sawi wa fi al-Tibb al-Nabawi manhal al-rawi*. He talked about bloodletting, anatomy, melancholy and the treatment of various diseases in his book. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah is also a traditionalist, but he wrote one of his handbooks on prophetic medicine (*al-Tibb al-Nabawi*), focusing on the use of cautery, honey, cupping, emesis, poison, magic, and treatment of them as well. He studied Ibn e Sina and al-Razi's work too. He said:

"The result is that the cause of temperamental illness is largely attributed to the predominance of the qualities of either of the two active humors, heat and cold. The prophetic saying about the underlying principles for the treatment of diseases, caused by excessive heat and cold- i.e. treatment by opposite – is in harmony with this opinion. If the disease is hot, we treat it by drawing out blood, whether by venesection or cupping; this means an evacuation of the matter and a cooling of the temperament. If it is cold we treat it by warming, property which is present in honey.⁽²⁾" He also discussed on the prevention and treatment of the plague, and made difference between plague and epidemics. He said that "waba and taun differ, one representing the general, the other the particular; every plague is a pestilence, but not every pestilence is a plague.⁽³⁾"

CONCLUSION:

The goal of this paper was to understand whether or not medical treatment and knowledge in Islamic point of view and the Prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) biography address the epidemics. Thus, by discussing and analyzing the references from the existing literature it was clarified that the concepts and theories and treatments of the epidemics had been mentioned but relatively neglected by the field experts later and to date. Modern views on contagion and infectious diseases were marked up to the 1550s but were later embraced on conservative basis. In fact, much of the writings had been written and profoundly rooted within the era's socio-cultural context. One western

⁽¹⁾ Al-Shatibi, Abu Ishaq. *Al-Muwafaqat fi usul al-Shariah*. Al-Maktabah al-Tawfikia, 2003.

⁽²⁾ Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Qayyim. "Medicine of the Prophet." (1998).

⁽³⁾ *Ibid*,28

historian, Paul Slack, wrote that, "Sudden disastrous events such as epidemics illuminate many facets of the societies with which they collide. They create situations of distress which test the institutions and the habits of mind and behavior, which normally hold society together.⁽¹⁾" So often, social dysfunction becomes the major factor in the issue. We see this social condition mainly within the context of Pakistan. We need to take radical steps to reform our social system so that society can produce problems of everyday life, whether they are pandemics or any other problems, and they can be easily settled. Otherwise we won't be able to come across these kinds of diseases.



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⁽¹⁾ Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England*. (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1985)

14. Al-Ghazzali, A. "Ihya-Ulum-Ud-Din (The Revival of Religious Learning) Trans." Fazal ul-Karim (nd) 1 (2011).
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