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Corona Pandemic: Fear and Challenges in Gujrat, Pakistan

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Abstract: *The biggest health disaster of the 21st century hit the world in Nov-2019 in the Hubei Province of China. The present study focused on the role of socio-cultural practices in the COVID-19 spread. Further geographical mobility discussed as a reason for the spread. It is a qualitative study based on observations, key informants' interviews, and desk research. The study revealed three main elements that bring Coronavirus to Gujrat, return of migrant laborers, and pilgrimages, especially from Iran and Saudi Arabia. The paper highlights the role of law enforcement agencies in the implementation of government policies to control the Corona spread. The role of religious institutions carries a significant value as paper research shows how people used the Mosques to get spiritual strength. The study finds that local socio-cultural practices became a major factor behind the high number of Corona cases in Gujrat. Cultural practices and facetious attitudes play a supporting role to spread COVID19 in Gujrat.*

Key Words: COVID-19, Corona, Corona and Pakistan, Corona and Punjab, Corona and Gujrat

Introduction

COVID-19 spread around the world in the second month of 2020. The WHO has announced a pandemic due to the increasing number of coronavirus patients. Around 1.9 million established COVID-19 persons globally, comprising 118,000 COVID-19 associated expiries rendering to the

statistics accumulated by Johns Hopkins University ([Aljazeera, 2020](#)).

The first case of the world was a 55-year-old person from China's Hubei province, have tapered COVID-19, the disease triggered by the new coronavirus dissemination crosswise the world. That case identified on 17-Nov-

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2019, reported by South Morning China Post (Jeanna, 2020). Wuhan incidence was started at the end of Dec-2019, after a month of that case of Hubei province. Initially, Chinese authorities were supposed the virus started from some food item sold at a wet market in the city. Anyhow over time, it is clear that this virus has no connection to the who market. Why? Because one of the initial cases included from 01-Dec-2019 in a person had nothing to do with that seafood market (Huang et al., Jan-20, 2020).

In Pakistan, the first COVID-19 patient was recognized on 26-Feb-2020, a 22 years old male who had a travel history from Iran in the last few days before testing results. He was feeling not good and visited Agha Khan University (AKU) for some medical tests. “Once his test results became positive, he was admitted immediately in Agha Khan Hospital, and the first decision of isolation was implemented by doctors and go for initial supportive medical treatment (The News, April 2020).”

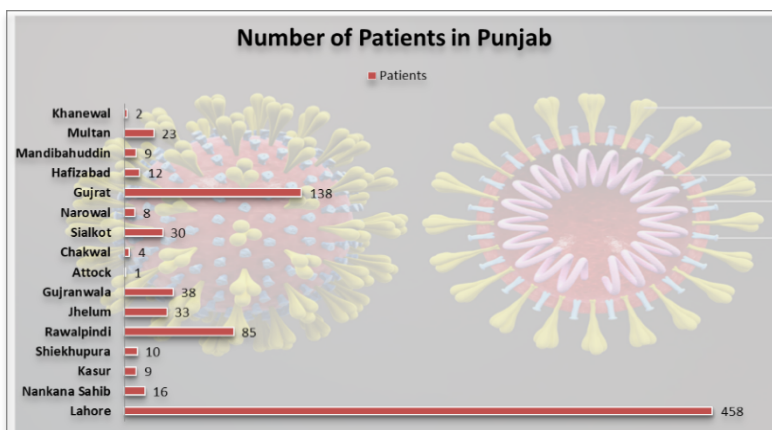
Patterns of disease in Pakistan are contrary to trends that happened in China. For Example, in China, people age 65 years and

above highly reported Coronavirus, while in Pakistan, the age bracket of patients is 21-

30 years. Data shows that 24% of patients in Pakistan belong to this age group. The pattern is different in many other nations where mostly older people were the target of Coronavirus” (Shahina, 2020). Shahina (2020) further discussed that Government official also presents an analysis of data as the number of confirmed patients in Pakistan crossed the 1,000 number; the Officials added that local diffusion of the Coronavirus positioned at 7%, meaning that 93% of the confirmed cases interacted with the virus in countries previously affected by it. Men account for 64% of the total cases, with 36% being women.

The first confirmed case in Punjab Province was identified in Lahore reported by Mohammad Usman [Health Secretary- Punjab Government]. The infected person had returned from the UK on 10-Marc-2020. After a positive report of Coronavirus, he was admitted to Mayo Hospital in an isolation ward (Ashfaq, March-2020).

The first time CM Punjab Usman Buzdar reported 3 cases in Gujrat on his tweeter page at 20-Mar-20 (Usman, March-2020). According to CM Punjab, current particulars of Non-Quarantined confirmed cases in different Districts are given below in the figure



Source: CM Punjab Tweeter Account (Usman, 14-April-2020, Timing: 01:14 AM)

The present study was designed to report the Corona pandemic status and the response of Gujrat's residents, especially how they respond toward it and what is the role of foreign returns to put Gujrat at number second in Punjab in the list of Coronavirus patients.

Material and Methods

The present research was designed to explore and discuss the Corona Pandemic situation in Gujrat and people's response toward it. Gujrat is mainly known for three facts; the i-largest fan is producing industry, ii-mud pots industry, and finally, the number of overseas workers. To do this, both primary and secondary data collected from Gujrat. Primary data depends on personal observations of researchers from the field, and secondary data were collected through key informants, political leaders, school teachers, Imam Masjid, and electronic media reports. Narrative analysis was mainly applied to discuss the results.

Results and Discussion

In Pakistan, Gujrat is at number five among the top reported cases of COVID-19. As we earlier discussed that this study was designed to explore the Corona Pandemic and the response of the people of Gujrat toward it. Data collected from multiple sources are discussed under 'characters/careers and their role', 'cultural practices', 'conscious imprudence', and 'law enforcement agencies.

Characters and Roles

While discussing any social, political, or health-related issues, we consider characters and their role to analyze the situation in detail and try to figure out the causes and effects of issues. To explain Corona situation in District Gujrat, we observed and divided characters

into certain heading like; foreign returns people, *Mullah's* religious clergy contribution, *Staff Galla* and lockdown, the role of *Tableeghi Jamat* [missionary Muslims], Police and Corona pandemic, the practice of prayer call (Azan) at nights and cultural attitude or responses toward Coronavirus.

Foreign Returns and Coronavirus Cases

Returns came from different countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, UK, Italy, Spain, Emirates, Dubai, Paris, Greece, Belgium, France were mainly observed. Started with the role of foreign returns that include 'Ziareen', 'Pilgrimages from Saudi Arabia', and overseas from any other country around the world. The first case of Gujrat was Mr. A s/o Mr. X belongs to *Shadiwal* Gujrat, who returned from Spain with his family. He was tested Corona positive by Doctors at Aziz Bhatti Shaheed Hospital Gujrat on March-16 2020, while on March-17 2020, his son Mr. B was also tested Corona positive from the same hospital. Luckily, both of them survived. This was the origin of the Corona cases in Gujrat. A woman belongs to Kulewal Syedan [located on Gujrat-Islamabad GT Road] came back from Denmark with Coronavirus. She passed away but soon after, 27 people from the same village reported Corona positive. Mr. C from Jalal Pur Sobatian [a town near Awan Sharif] was also a foreign return; he was tested at home by a team of doctors and isolated for fifteen days. These examples from different parts of the Gujrat show the role of foreign returns to increase Corona cases. It was also reported that Mr. Y from Gujrat was able to cross the security check at National Airport by bribing security officials while coming back from Italy. He attended his family followed by marriage and then after security forces take him and his family along with them. Mr. D S/O Mr. Z

resident of urban Gujrat, also came from Spain and became a reason for Corona spread in his family. Umra returns from Saudi Arabia were also a reason for coronavirus spread. An example of this was Ms. E W/O Mr. F from Village Chakanwali [Daulat Nager]. Pilgrimages (Zaireen) from Iran were also observed as Corona carriers in Gujrat. Mr. H s/o Mr. J from village Lakhanwal is an example.

Transfer of virus from Iran to Pakistan is being linked with the non-availability of test equipment along with the staff at the Taftan border of Iran and Pakistan. A private TV channel reported that hundreds of people crossed the Taftan border daily. Though, the screening facilities are only available at Quetta Airport ([NNI, February 23, 2020](#)). Those untested virus carriers spread around the country, and Gujrat is also faced with the consequences. [Mangi and Qayum report \(March-18, 20\)](#) from Islamabad that the National Institute of Health (NIH) reported 204 patients on Wednesday. Around 60 percent of the cases have recent travel history from Iran. Iran, the country, is bearing the third-highest number of patients as part of a Ziareen to Holy Shrines. The rest of the region has 166 cases, with about 90% in India ([Mangi and Qayum, March-18, 2020](#)).

In Pakistani culture, celebration practices after performing significant religious rituals are more often observed around the country. [Kermani \(March-27, 2020\)](#) reported the first death of Pakistan due to this virus. He was returned from Saudi Arabia after performing "Umra". After his death, extensive testing was performed in his village, and 46 persons reported Corona positive.

Role of Religious Leaders (Mullahs)

Religion and religious leaders are important as

they guide people about the seriousness of the situation, and the majority of the people their suggestions and guidelines seriously. In the case of the Corona pandemic, the religious clergy did not handle the situation as they were expected. The Government of Pakistan announced that social distancing is a key to avoid Coronavirus, but religious leaders took it as a conspiracy vested by Jews and Americans against Muslims to keep them away from their religion. So they did not initially agree to enforce social isolation in Mosques (Masjid). Especially the religious leaders who live in rural areas showed less concern about the seriousness of the disease and practised congregations for Friday prayers in the mosques. Besides offering prayers in the mosques, they are also practising hand-shake and hugs like before the Corona. Thus, they did not perform their duty to raise awareness among the masses and people who follow them; instead, they motivated them to behave opposite of government and WHO's instructions. However, after the pressures from law enforcement agencies, some flexibility has been observed in the behavior of religious leaders. And they announced and started practising some social distancing at the Mosques.

Staff Galla and Lockdown

Positive cases from staff Galla Gujrat convinced authorities to implement lockdown in Gujrat city, and with the help of Pakistan Ranger's lockdown was imposed. 10 cases were tested positive in one go. Initially, staff galla was sealed, but later, this decision was implemented in the whole Gujrat. Another major operation was done near the shrine of Nangay Shah Gujrat in the presence of DCO, Army, Police, and doctors, and 16 patients were tested Corona positive as a result.

Tableeghi Jamat [Muslim Missionary Group] and Corona Spread

Along with pilgrimages Ziareen from Iran, and Saudi Arabia and other overseas returns, the role of Tableeghi Jamat free movement in the current pandemic cannot be overlooked. Setting aside the role of government to control their movement, morality and precautions were not considered by these religious persons. Along with other cities, Gujrat is also affected by these Tableeghi Jamat movements from one place to another. The cases were recorded by DHQ Gujrat regarding Tableeghi Jamat persons; they have consisted of local along with two belongs to Sindh, from KPK, Gujranwala, Haripur, Faisalabad, and one is from Sudan. And consequences will be confronted by the people of Gujrat. Data reported that from Iran to Malaysia, these religious groups and visitors have appeared as threats, diffusing the virus in such traditions that are showing hard to find and contain ([Emont, and Shah, March-18, 2020](#)).

The annual assembly of Tablighi Jamaat, a worldwide conventional Muslim missionary group, carried together thousands of Muslim missionaries around 80 states and has elevated worries about the Corona spread throughout Pakistan and outside. As reported by Hadid that five missionaries from Kyrgyzstan stayed in an Islamabad's mosque coming back from Jamaat congregation and tested positive. ([Hadid, March-23, 2020](#)).

Law Enforcement and Corona Pandemic

The current coronavirus pandemic around the world has established responses that have rigorously affected people throughout the globe. The situation in Pakistan is not so different from the rest of the world. And this situation demands new social order protocols, as experts suggested.

As a researcher, we experienced a lockdown situation in Gujrat and tried to observe the role of law enforcement agencies daily by using both direct and indirect observations. It was observed that role of law enforcement was not as strictly followed as it may require in both urban and rural areas, while the situation is quite different in urban areas as compared to rural areas. In rural areas, lockdown is not observed according to governmental orders in markets and the rest of daily interaction places. A comparison of local police with the Rangers and Army staff shows that the latter is more responsible and committed to their job. It is also observed that if one road blockades are tightened for travellers at one site but the next one relaxed for movement. Double "Sawari" is restricted by rules but practiced on the ground; even policeman performing their duty on motorbikes are usually exercise "double sawari".

Azan Practice [Prayer Call]

"In a Pandemic, Religion Can Be a Balm and a Risk"

The Prophet (SAW) has taught us the best deeds are those that done consistently, even if they are small. The Companions said that the Prophet ﷺ was not given an option between two things except that he chose the easiest of them out of concern for people – not desiring to put them through hardship (Tirmidhi). The irregular prayer calls were not only seen in Gujrat or Pakistan but also observed in the rest of the world where Muslims lived. The basic objective of this activity was to get energy from divine powers and seek help from God (Allah جَلَّ جَلَّ). At 11:00 pm, prayer calls used to start and afterwards, people do this as per their convenience from their rooftops.

[Shah \(Marc-30, 20\)](#) reported that the

people of Mardan villages try to get divine help from Azan to ward off Coronavirus. And they start praying at 10:30 pm and continue till 11 pm in a bid to shake off the Coronavirus. The older persons of communities stated that reciting Azan was practising for centuries to appeal Allah's Blessings to get his protection from natural disasters and calamities.

Cultural Attitude/Responses

A historical saying is "a person's true character is revealed in a crisis," and if this current virus has educated us whatever so far, the same can be assumed for the rest of the country (BBC Travel, Marc-28, 2020). Yusufzai stated that the main fear triggered by the COVID-19 took time to register as the attitude toward it was rather indifferent initially. To date, most of the Pakistanis, mostly religiously inspired persons and rest living in rural/remote zones, endure to live and act the way they usually did, unconscious or not having much knowledge of viruses that may lead to death ([Yusufzai, March-29, 2020](#)).

Unlike many western countries, Pakistan presents exceptional concerns due to the entanglement of its traditional and religious rigid practices. Beliefs and practices simultaneous with deprived socio-cultural and economic measures further add to its woes.

Along with cultural beliefs and practices, misinformation regarding health-related issues circulating dynamically across Pakistan through different social media platforms. This information is culturally rooted and person-driven, which leads to the misconception about the gravity of the disease. And if we observe the situation of India, the situation is

quite similar to in Pakistan. [Mufsin and Muhsin \(Mar-25, 2020\)](#) highlight the role of cultural input to spread misunderstanding and misinformation about this current trend prevailing in India.

Cultural attitudes or responses placed at the end of this discussion because the spread of Coronavirus in Gujrat mainly depends on socio-cultural practices. The reasons are following firstly, in the case of Gujrat, as we discussed earlier that most of the people settled abroad for their income/job and became carriers of the virus. Secondly, the people of Pakistan routinely visit Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj and Umra throughout the year; besides, Gujrat has a big portion of the Ahle Tashui "*Shia*" community who visit Iran frequently. And a local community feels honored to welcome them and meet them on their arrival and get some gifts in return. Thirdly, 'Ziareen' coming from religious and spiritual sites of Iran, Iraq or Syria also experienced the same response from local people. And in the case of Coronavirus, these three are the main transporters of the virus from abroad; as the number of visitors increased, the probability of getting more people infected with the virus increased and the frequency of visits to foreign return families increased the chances of getting a positive Corona test. In the light of the above paragraphs, we concluded that strong socio-cultural and religious practices, especially communal celebration, visiting patterns, interaction styles, collective feasting in joint extended families, and neighboring patterns establish important social and behavioral features that create serious challenges.

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Appendix

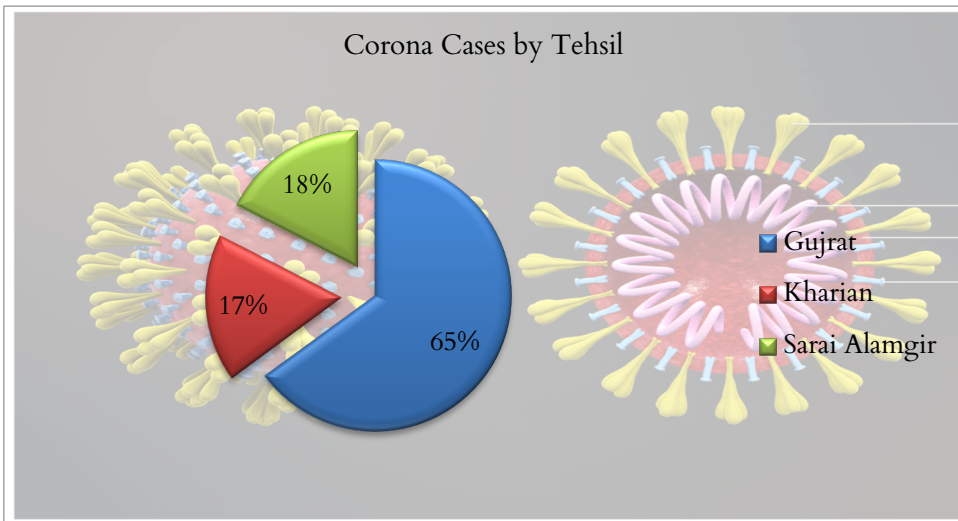


Figure 1: Tehsil Wise Corona Cases in Gujrat till 14-April-2020

Table 1. Tehsil Wise Distribution of Cases Till 14-April-2020

Country from Travel	Tehsil Distribution		
	Gujrat	Kharian	Sarai Alamgir
Local	61.9%	47.1%	88.2%
Return from Belgium	1.6%		
Return from Dubai	1.6%		
Return from France	1.6%		
Return from Greece	1.6%		
Return from Iran	14.3%	17.6%	5.9%
Return from Italy	1.6%	11.8%	
Return from Oman	1.6%		
Return from Paris			5.9%
Return from Saudi Arabia	3.2%		
Return from Spain	7.9%	23.5%	
Return from UK	3.2%		
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Police Department, Gujranwala Region