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Practice disease distancing – how India can use corona crisis to kill its caste virus.

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## Practice disease distancing – how India can use corona crisis to kill its caste virus.



The coronavirus does not care whether one is a Dalit or Brahmin, Muslim or Christian. Modi govt and media must stop recommending 'social distancing' as a measure. when the world is under siege by the coronavirus' 'war against humanity' and the 'social distancing' is being projected as the only protective gear, India faces the danger of practising untouchability again with which it has suffered for millennia. The Narendra Modi government and the country's media must avoid recommending 'social distancing' as a measure and use only 'disease distancing'. No patient of coronavirus is socially

untouchable. S/he needs to be kept at a distance from others so that his/her mouth or nasal droplets do not reach a healthy person. And once that virus disappears from his/her body, s/he is more resilient than anyone who did not get infected by the virus. The idea must be to keep a distance from the Covid-19 disease, not humans. Even the

World Health Organization (WHO) now prefers to call it 'physical distancing' instead of 'social distancing'. A casteist campaign: But several brahminical and caste fundamentalist campaigns have used the 'social distancing' measure to defend caste discrimination, saying their castebased distancing is a cure for coronavirus that they had discovered thousands of years ago. Even in an otherwise rationalist and Dravidian state like Tamil Nadu, this mantra is being spread on social media. The same forces are also saying that meat (lamb, beef, chicken, fish and egg) eaters will get coronavirus but vegetarians won't. This dirty campaign saw the closure of all meat shops in Telangana. Then, chief minister K.

Chandrashekar Rao, on the advice of doctors, made a strong plea to the people to eat more meat for protein because this will help them develop a better immune system, which is crucial in the fight against coronavirus. From the next morning, there were massive queues outside chicken and mutton shops. With one press conference, he dismantled the negative campaign and helped bring the price of the produce down. Even the poor in Telangana are eating chicken now. What a virus can teach us. The coronavirus does not care whether one is a Dalit or Brahmin, Muslim or Christian, man or a woman. It does not care whether one is a meat eater or a vegetarian. It can affect anyone but its fatality rate is low. Those who cracked jokes about the food habits of Chinese must understand that China has defeated the disease to a large extent through science and medicine and with the help of highly alert doctors like Li Wenliang.

At a time when religious institutions all over the world have shut their doors and people who depend on religion have to turn to doctors and

medicine and scientifically tested food that help build a healthy immune system, spreading brahminical myth and human untouchability in India will do more damage to the nation. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, after his strenuous research, had told us that Buddhist beef-eating communities were later designated as 'untouchables'. But it was from these untouchable Dalits that many survived the 1897 bubonic plague in which one crore Indians died. The Bahujans, who were always the ones to carry dead bodies for burial or cremation because upper caste people wouldn't touch their own family members out of fear of contracting the plague, had built a strong immunity by eating beef. A recent national survey found that over 70 per cent of people who eat beef are from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), 21 per cent are from Other Backward Classes and only 7 per cent belong to upper castes. Most Dalits during the bubonic plague survived only on the strength of their immunity as there was no hospital support in the villages. Their experience is still valid to fight coronavirus. The

bubonic plague of 1897 was much more dangerous than the Covid-19 pandemic, but it has acquired a global presence within a short span time, threatening the world economy. We should kill this virus as soon as possible for human good.

The post-pandemic India

One hopes that in a post-coronavirus India, all food restrictions and ostracisation of communities would end because this pandemic is teaching us new nationalist lessons – protect and save Indians with good food, whichever food they eat, and with improved medical and health care. In fact, the post-pandemic India should be a nation of shared food, medicine and housing resources by men and women of all castes, communities, religions, putting the history of human untouchability and casteism behind us. We should move towards developing a more scientific temper while practising human equality. It is now proved that a virus is more dangerous than nuclear war. While fighting the virus, we should show more social solidarity and empathy for

oppressed castes and groups. Disease distancing is a short-time measure. But if we push into every person's psyche that social distancing should be as systemically practised as caste-driven human untouchability, then India will never be able to develop and successfully fight future virus wars. In this situation where we are struggling to fight climate change, we do not know what kind of viruses will attack us in the future. Religious dogmas do not save us in such scenarios, but science will definitely come to our rescue every time. But this is another malaise that the Indian society is currently fighting, even during an ongoing pandemic. Instances of doctors and nurses being evicted by their landowners from rented properties show a new level of selfishness. They ignore that it's these doctors and nurses who will save them if they contract Covid-19 or any other disease. Human untouchability and extreme selfishness without any sense of collective social responsibility will only make India more vulnerable to death and destruction. The coronavirus crisis, which has shaken the entire world and is destroying even

developed economies, must make India's radical and fundamentalist forces think that their country and the world will be a different place once the pandemic has been overcome. Human relationships will have to be completely repositioned with reduced selfishness, warmongering and ultra-nationalist behaviours of Right-wing ideologues. Only re-induced tolerance of plural food cultures, secular practices and complete absence of human untouchability will have to become the new normal. Every life is equal and every human being is a gift of god. Let us all learn this from the new world that is emerging out of this war against a virus.