

## An Impact of Plague Epidemic on Society

( Lokmanya's Vision on Health Care)

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### ABSTRACT:

Lokmanya Tilak is a multi-faceted personaility known as narrator of Swaraj, a great visionary of Nationalism, a researcher , mathematician, astro-mathematician, a Sanskrit pandit, historian and an editor. With these qualities Mahatma Gandhi entitled him with “ Maker of Modern India .” His visionary thoughts are modern and realistic which reflects regarding Health care in the year 1896 -97 during plague epidemic and feminine which created havoc in Maharashtra. The plague spread rapidly like wildfire throughout Maharashtra at Mumbai and later at Pune. The first case in Pune was detected in the month of October 1896. The British government applied some stringent measures and Lokmanya Tilak had assured and given co-operation to such measures and conveyed his thoughts related to anti-plague measures through editorials in Kesari and told people to co-operate with Government .But he did not anticipate that the Government would turn to some kind of vengeance by the British officers. Lokmanya Tilak moved from village to village to create awareness to control plague whereas Government officers seemed frustrated to tackle the plague epidemic and Lokmanya Tilak at that point in time backed the Government .The plague spread rapidly like wildfire throughout Maharashtra at Mumbai and at Pune .

In Poona also, great care was taken against the spreading of the disease, it went on capturing place after place. When people were passing through such a torture of anxiety, the Kesari published articles with detailed guidance of anti-

plague measures of general information with respect to the administration of local affairs and rules of hygiene and sanitation. To administer remedies against the plague Mr. Rand was specially appointed February 1897. Mr. Rand was a absolute indicator for the launching of a repressive policy which resulted in events that, even after a lapse of 30 years and more, revive shocking memories in the hearts of the people of Poona and elsewhere. The policemen without fear used to catch hold of any man in the street on suspicion of plague, force him to stand and deliver at the point of a weapon and press him into the hospital, if he refused to comply. The Government took precautionary measures; and in proportion as the disease became more and more fatal and perilous, the measures also grew more and more rigorous.

On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1897, The Government passed an Interim provision which was similar in effect like the rules under Martial Law but Aimed at curbing the plague menace .Anyone who challenged these measures could also be arrested and jailed. Quarantines were equated to death traps by the masses. Lokmanya Tilak was against the stern measures. Lokmanya Tilak brought together young medical doctors to educate masses and created awareness among people.

Lokmanya Tilak asserted that the mal-administration and repression practiced by Mr. Rand and his myrmidons would not have been so abandoned, if the more enlightened sections of the people had made common cause with each other in concerting joint remedies and joint arrangements to stop the progress of the plague. That a large number of such people fled away with their families. was a disgraceful fact and an evidence of their incapacity to meet dangerous situations

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

Researcher adopted the historical review approach of Lokmanya vision related to health care during plague epidemic.

In 1897, there occurred an epidemic of the bubonic plague in major cities of Maharashtra the people were extremely stressed by one of the most devastating of famines that took place in India and also the bubonic plague which appeared for the first time in this country. From the early beginnings of 1897 this twin disaster of the famine and the plague spread throughout the whole of Maharashtra. but the other disaster of the plague was absolutely a stranger to them. People knew the

consequences of famine; but the result of the plague was wholly unbelievable to them. Doctors were helpless to control it. In India, the plague first appeared in certain slums of Bombay. It gradually increased in proportions, till at last the whole of the city was entirely affected. People began to move from one part of the city to another unaffected part and when that part also was caught up in the infection, people started moved out to towns far and near, spreading on the way the virulent. In Pune ,every household lost atleast one member.To administer remedies against the plague British government appointed Mr. Rand ,an Army Officer on special duty February 1897. Mr. Rand ruthlessly adopted actions like quarantine, disinfection, etc. and was an absolute indicator for the launching of a repressive policy which resulted in events that, even after a lapse of 30 years and more, revive shocking memories in the hearts of the people of Poona and elsewhere. The policemen without fear used to catch hold of any man in the street on suspicion of plague, force him to stand and deliver at the point of a weapon and press him into the hospital, if he refused to comply. The Government took precautionary measures; and in proportion as the disease became more and more fatal and perilous, the measures also grew more and more rigorous. In Poona also, great care was taken against the dissemination of the disease, it went on capturing place after place. When people were passing through such a torture of anxiety, the Kesari published articles with detailed guidance of anti-plague measures of general information with respect to the administration of local affairs and rules of hygiene and sanitation. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1897, The Government passed an Interim provision which was similar in effect like .the rules under Martial Law but Aimed at curbing the plague menace .Anyone who challenged these measures could also be arrested and jailed. Quarantines were equated to death traps by the masses. Tilak was against the stern measures. Lokmanya Tilak brought together young medical doctors to educate masses and created awareness among people. The harassments of the people had no limits "In defiance of the rules of the Plague Committee, the British soldiers entered kitchens and places of worship contaminating food and spitting upon idols or breaking them and throwing them into the streets... But that was not the worst. Women were dragged into the streets and stripped for inspection under the pretext that there was not enough light in the houses. Media reported the violation of two women, one of whom is reported to have committed suicide rather than survive her shame. People suffering from plague were dragged away from the beds; their relatives were refused interviews with them. Those

tortures reached such a crisis that in those days one would rather die than find oneself in the hands of those unkind persons. At the same time Lokmanya Tilak strongly criticised the policy that was laid down by the Government. He pointed out to the Government that they did not prevent the importation of plague in Bombay in the first instance, and then it spread outside Bombay. He clearly told the Government that the application of excessive strictness in preventive measures "after the actual appearance of plague was not calculated to check the poison effectively; but rather they would cause unbearable harassments to the people,

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against the hospitals and the quarantine, in as sarcastic terms as he fated the stupidity of the people in believing the hospitals to be institutions for killing men. All the while, when Tilak was engaged in constantly exposing the faulty nature of the Government's arrangements, he himself thought carefully the idea and plan of a separate private hospital.

The policemen without fear used to catch hold of any man in the street on suspicion of plague, force him to stand and deliver at the point of a weapon and press him into the hospital, if he refused to comply. Before the powerful attack of the army of the defensive officers, nothing was sacred."While Lokmanya Tilak was exposing the cowardly behaviour of the people, he did not spare the Government for their exploitive measures." Week after week, through his paper he continued to warn the Government against inflaming the public mind by unbearably hard and strict measures. Whatever the Government intended to do, he emphasised, it must be done through and in consultation with the local leaders and the local institutions. Examining houses for tracing plague-cases grew increasingly provoking anxiety and insulting. the relatives of a person suffering from plague were troubled. When the party of disinfectors entered a house marked red as infected, it was as it were a party of robbers and dacoits attacking it. A private hospital was set up through his instrumentality near the present site of the Poona Young Cricketers Hindu Gymkhana, to which the people willingly sent their plague-cases, He demonstrated to the Government that the people resented their interference and tried to hide rather than surrender plague-cases, because the plague officials had given no trustworthy credentials of their beneficent behaviour and that they took full advantage of the private hospital, because the arrangements were convenient to them and the treatment accorded to them quite in their line.

After a deadly and desolating devastation the epidemic began gradually to subside. On the 16th of May the enforcement of the anti-plague measures was declared to have been closed. The epidemic disappeared; the plague committee was dismantled; the military rule of Mr. Rand was abolished. But the memory of the exploits during the plague-regime could never be wiped out \ For the people, it would certainly be easy to forgive the violence perpetrated over them, but it was impossible to forget them altogether.

That dark period in the history of Maharashtra served one purpose very well. It provided a humiliating reply to all those who do nothing .Lokmanya Tilak's conduct

in the famine and in the plague proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he was not merely a destructive critic but a constructive statesman of a high order. His criticism of the Government's policy with respect to the anti-plague measures had always been coupled with constructive suggestions. As it was, he went even beyond mere suggestions. The maintenance of a hospital perhaps more efficiently managed than the Government's own hospital and surely more serviceable to the people, to the credit of the constructive genius of Tilak. Lokmanya Tilak, , was living and moving in the plague-affected areas without taking thought for his own life, for the noble object of giving relief to his community .

### **NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF STUDY:**

The plague had reached India through China where it was rampant then. But the famine meant importing food, through the port of Hong Kong. As the bags of rice and wheat were getting unloaded in the port of Mumbai, it also unloaded the deadly carrier of plague, viz. rats. The plague spread rapidly like wildfire and spread throughout Maharashtra. Plague ran riot and was to be contained through special measures. Deputy Collector at Satara was known as a dynamic officer in the revenue service. Hence he was transferred as officer on special duty for prevention of plague.

The city of Mumbai was not severely affected by outbreak although it broke out there. Plague was known to be bubonic plague. This was derived from the word buboes, meaning swollen lymph nodes. Its symptoms included high fever and buboes at the joints. The plague made inroads in all parts of cities as well as villages and broke the back of people who had already suffered a lot due to the famine. At first it moved with the people and vehicles from Mumbai to Pune and thereafter to all parts of Maharashtra and spread elsewhere too. Pune saw the first case of plague in October 1896. That time Kesari had reported that 'stray cases of plague are seen among those who have recently arrived from Mumbai.' But it soon converged on the entire city. Clogged drains, dirty surrounding, granaries, lack of cleanliness and dirt around were the breeding grounds of rodents. Coupled with this was the absence of civic sense and awareness about cleanliness. This played foul and meant most suitable conditions for the spread of plague. Numbers of deaths mounted daily and were reported from all over the city. The dead included Hindus and Muslims. The plague was not partial to any caste, creed or community.

So apart from Lokmanya's vision of Swarajya, Swadeshi, Boycott, and National education, researcher as a nurse professional this will help the society and young generation to be aware of Lokmanya's work related to healthcare during plague epidemic to control the situation of plague epidemic, the principles for this can be applied in practice, education of nursing profession and centenary Tribute on occasion of Lokmanya's 100<sup>th</sup> death anniversary.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

The British had faced this situation but in the year 1665, more than two hundred years ago. The Great Plague in London killed an estimated hundred thousand people, about 20 percent of its population. The 1664-66 epidemics were remembered afterwards as the "great" plague only because it was the last widespread outbreak of bubonic plague in England during the four-hundred-year time span.

The story of Tilak's son is upsetting. When his son Vishwanath was suffering from plague, Tilak moved to a small hut close to the river bank. He and wife Satyabhamabai took turns to sit beside Vishwanath. Tilak would sit by his side and write articles for "Maharatta" and Kesari. They lost their son and both were in grief but they never showed it.

The anti-plague measures were soon published in Kesari. The news of courts and offices getting closed as well as people moving out to Gujarat were published. The incoming flow of people from Mumbai was viewed and at times searched. But these measures were inadequate and very soon the localities near the railway stations were observed to be with plague patients. This also made Kesari publish few articles with detailed guidance of anti-plague measures. The medical doctors also wrote articles guiding the public. Tilak reprimanded local people against negligent attitude. While the Government was careless in the beginning, Tilak still supported those few measures of the Government. Opposing the measures of the Government when the magnitude of the disease was on huge scale, could have been counterproductive.

Rand established the first encampment of plague victims on the other side of the Mutha River in Pune city. This was a quarantine measure. These measures to prevent the spread of plague were objected to by Tilak. He generally was of the opinion that Rand is following the right measures and was Rand's associate in various committees. On 4th February

1897, the Government passed an interim provision which was similar in effect like the rules under Martial Law but aimed at curbing the plague menace. Anyone who challenged these measures could also be arrested and jailed under the same provisions, "This act will be contrary to the peoples' rights" was asserted by the Prince of the State of Darbhanga. P. Anandacharyalu also claimed the same opinion, while the Government goaded people claiming that the moment deserved cooperation of all the people and unitedly fighting the plague. Kesari sincerely advised all the people to arrest the spread of plague by admitting every patient in the hospitals.

Tilak was of the opinion that if Government actions were effective and effectively administered to reduce the deaths, they need to be supported. But the legal powers granted for a cause were abused frequently. The soldiers used to burn the belongings or simply steal them as burning down of a property was found easier than fumigating it. Requests, applications, entreaties, or whimpers were hardly found useful in saving a property or belongings. Anybody moving near the quarantine zone was arbitrarily pushed inside it and cases were made that such a healthy person would soon catch plague so needs to be quarantined. Such cases created resentment turning into rage. Government found itself helpless and maybe out of frustration, lost sense of proportion and sympathy. Thus, heightened tyrannical attitude resulted in more deaths.

The British Historian, Lawrence James has quoted some facts about that period in his book titled '**Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India**' which depicts the atrocities that burn the hearts of the students of history. He claims that the plague menace did not recede even after appointment of Rand for quite some time. Numbers of deaths mounted daily and were reported from all over the city. The dead included Hindus and Muslims. The plague was not partial to any caste, creed or community. The Government was maligned in the minds of all the subjects. The higher ups in the Government had convinced themselves that the law enforcement must become stricter all over the affected areas for any results to come by. India Secretary Lord George Hamilton was upset over the entire chain of events and therefore ordered, 'If the ordinary persuasive efforts do not yield the masses to submit to the plague control measures, make it compulsory to adhere to the processes but bring the epidemic under control.' In February 1897, the Haj pilgrims were disallowed embarkation. Thus no Muslim could take up the Haj pilgrimage from India. Soldiers had upon themselves a free access at the houses in the cities of Mumbai and Pune. Muslim women were unmasked of veils. Hindu



ladies were summoned to disrobe all the upper garments to search for-lymph (buboes) in the armpits. These were the details which were not published in The Times of India and other Anglo-Indian newspapers. In such outrageous circumstances, Tilak was unlikely to keep quiet. Even if the details given by Lawrence James are assumed to be exaggerated, the other measures of the Government were equally perturbing and worth revolting. Kesari had a print order of 15000 per week, in those times but had an impact readership of over a few lakh. The inhuman attitudes of the authorities made Tilak fly with rage. He started lecturing in every locality, in every ward and corners. One such meeting wherein he lectured was in a red-light area of Budhwar Peth. The opponents had a field day while reporting the meeting. A newspaper reported with headlines, 'Prostitutes attended Tilak's lecture in large numbers!' Although many others attended the gathering, the paper reported that 'the usual attendees were absent for the meeting while people generally indifferent were present in the meet.' This made Tilak thunder against the attitude expressed by the newspaper. He wrote, 'Many of these prostitutes were served notices to vacate their premises by the Plague Committee. And as such they were present to submit their grievances in the meeting which is a right of every citizen. There neither was any special invitation for them nor were they seated in a special location. As every patient has to go to the doctor, everyone affected by the present circumstances has a right to get their problems heard publicly.'

#### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:**

During 1896-97, plague and famine created havoc in Maharashtra as well as other parts of India, The Government applied some stringent measures and Tilak had assured and given all the cooperation to such measures. 'As the Government is facing and taking the responsibility of saving human and cattle lives on an unprecedented scale, the people also must learn to render cooperation to the government measures even if it means their adherence to some kind of stricter discipline.' These thoughts were expressed by him in his editorials in Kesari. But he did not anticipate that the Government would turn to some kind of vengeance by the officers. Tilak moved from village to village whereas the Government officers seemed frustrated while facing the situation. And Tilak at that point in time backed the Government. The plague had reached India through China where it was rampant then. But the famine meant importing food, through the port of Hong Kong. As the bags of rice and wheat were getting unloaded in the port of Mumbai, it also unloaded the deadly carrier of plague, viz. rats. The plague spread rapidly like wildfire and spread throughout Maharashtra. Plague ran riot and was to be contained through special measures. Deputy Collector at

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Tilak brought together young medical doctors for educating the masses and awakening the people. He directed their energies through the Municipal Corporation. He wrote an article on 16th February 1897 and quoted an appointment of Rand for plague eradication. 'Keeping the plague affected patients quarantined from others, removal of public dirt and household garbage, providing adequate ventilation, if necessary by taking away the tiles placed on the roofs and constructing additional windows, removal of people from dirty houses and locations to safe and clean environments, the items used by the dead patient are to be cleaned by using the right process, are some of the measures that must be taken for effective control over the spread of plague. And these will be coordinated through Rand who is an officer of the rank of Dy. Collector. He comes here from a stint in Satara.'

Lokmanya quoted in Kesari. And this cannot be considered to be anti-Rand opinion.

On 20th April 1897, again he published many anti-plague measures but he noted that the Plague Committee in Mumbai was headed by a noble hearted person which was not the case in Pune. The government measures could not be different for different places. 'If the indiscipline and harsh treatments do not get revoked, it will be an indelible blot on the name of Lord Sandhurst. We are aware that Lord Sandhurst himself wishes better treatment to the poor. But the wish alone will not make them get proper food in segregation camps or scorching heat faced by our households when the patient leaves for the camp. So we request His Majesty the Governor to rein in the subordinates and control them. Otherwise the current feelings of the citizens are that medicine is worse than cure and the administration of Lord Sandhurst is like another name for tyranny.'

'Suggestions on Plague' was another article which depicts the situation in Pune during those times. This also serves as continuation of the above editorial. It notes, 'The above gives the atrocities due to government agency but the plague has not only bared the government in action but it has also exposed our so called leaders of the society.

Tilak was like a wrestler of sorts when it came to trouncing an opponent found with weak arguments. The above is sufficient evidence for those discontented souls who stamped Tilak as conformist. It seems such accusers need to improve their reading content and its scope. There was no one to guide the masses in those appalling times of history. While Rand was at his zenith of atrocities, none came forward to awaken the masses. Hon. Mr Gokhale spoke against these wrongdoings in England but later withdrew his comments. Tilak pleaded all cooperation with authorities towards the anti-plague measures but when it came to excesses, ill treatments, compulsive measures or rudeness of soldiers, he used his pen like a sword protecting all the people. He united all the castes, all the citizens, be they Hindus or Muslims, Jains or Dalits, rich or poor. He preached not only patience but also about indomitable spirit of the winners.

There was a rumour that any patient admitted in hospitals was sure to die. Tilak made visits to various hospitals and clarified that admittance to the hospitals was a sure remedy for the disease and keeping a plague patient at home may not only be fatal to the patient but also to the others unaffected in the household. The Government also was after the municipality to raise taxes to support the plague remedies. This was unhealthy. The command from the higher ups to take strict action brought the European soldiers into the kitchens of the citizens. There were differences between Lord Sandhurst and Rand on ways of execution. Tilak highlighted the measures which caused hardships. And there was no shortage of these. Rand's police would burn down a house which had a patient of plague. A day came when 84 persons died of plague same day. Half the population deserted the

The Governor made it mandatory that a local volunteer must accompany soldiers entering any house of a native. The bureaucracy also believed that people kept the dead in their house without final rites as they were afraid of anti-plague measures. The city of Pune was almost cordoned off by the army from all sides. The administration was equated with Mughal rule. Tilak advised local volunteers to bar the European soldiers from an untoward behaviour. He also advised the citizens not to make fuss about such an entry of

a foreigner in the house.

Around the same time was festival Muharrum (traditional Muslim festival) and the district police disallowed its observance. Tilak objected to a total ban and noted in the Kesari, 'Plague has caused a lot of havoc but banning the ritual of the nature of Muharrum is inconsiderate. Officials could put a limitation on number of persons in a gathering or distance within which the Tabuts should be immersed. Putting a total ban is however, an oppressive decision. This is overzealous attitude.' He gave the differences between observance of Muharrum and other village fairs. He noted, 'Muharrum is not a milage fair. In a village fair, villagers from many surrounding villages gather while Muharrum is celebrated locally by local people. Maybe this time, not many will gather on account of plague. Banning Muharrum in Pune and allowing it to be observed in Mumbai is again discriminatory. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1897, a celebration was held at Vitthal temple, in order to express their anger against Anti-plague measures and to express their faith in Swarajya S.M. Paranjpe., Prof. Jinsiwale, Prof. Banu said where injustice prevails, Afjal khan needs to be killed. It is said that Chapekar who was later hanged for Rand's murder, sung the verses as noted "Shivaji's utterances" at that point Tilak asked him "if you are so full of valour, how come Rand is still alive?" Tilak was as usual, the firebrand but a logical speaker. He said "It is needless to make historical researches in connection with the killing of Afzal Khan. No blame is attached to any person if he is doing deeds without being actuated by a desire to reap the fruits. With benevolent intentions he murdered Afzal Khan for good to others. Do not keep your vision like a frog in a well; get out of the Penal Code, enter into the heavenly world of the Shrimat Bhagwad Geeta and then consider the actions of great men". Objections were raised on these speeches by Times of India. Somebody having taken the pen name of 'Justice' was after Tilak. and the Government was seeking some background noise to put Lokmanya Tilak under pressure. Rand was killed and it made British officers contemplate that Tilak must have caused the unrest, whether by speeches, by writing or by direct incitement. The times of India termed the lecture of Prof. Bhanu about assassination of Afzal Khan and Tilak's presence there as provocative to Cause the people to rise against the British Rule. Times also called a poem published in Kesari titled Shivaji's Utterances as provocative enough for causing enmity in the communities and cause sedition. They also viewed that later happenstance of Rand was caused because of publication of this poem. Damodar Chapekar decided to publish his autobiography SAYS, "I am a Hindu and will not lie even if I have to face the death. I will not make innocents to suffer."The officers realised that

Damodar paid no heed to their pressure to make Tilak involved in the Rand Murder. But in order to prove that Tilak's writings caused unrest and resulted in murders of British officers, the first trial of sedition was filed. It was the result of vengeance against Tilak and their yearning against Tilak. The Times of India provided the fire against Pune with vengeance and simultaneously people became wary of actions of Rand and also about British repression in general.

### **CONCLUSION:**

On the whole, Lokmanya Tilak's attitude towards the anti-plague measures was entirely reasonable. He fearlessly censured the people for their extreme orthodoxy in the matter of the refusal to adopt the necessary preventive and curative measures. Though the dreadful regime of the plague and the remedies against it was nearly brought to an end but the restlessness that was there in the last six months because of the dreadful tragedy at last exploded and this resulted into the murder of Mr. Rand

### **FURTHER RESEARCH:**

Lokmanya Tilak mentioned only religion, border, language and back history are not only the parameters for building a Nation. Every individual should think their progress in larger interest of a Nation. Also the vision of national education is important in health profession.

Lokmanya's principle in relation to plague control measures was mainly on health awareness regarding cleanliness, quarantine and disinfection measures, health education and principle of psychology i.e. to advice or counselling people to understand the importance of isolation, hospitalisation and prevention. These principles are also applicable in Health care system, as well as all core areas in nursing profession.

Further research studies can be undertaken on:

- ❖ Hygiene, cleanliness, infection control in hospitals as well as in community/ public health to prevent and control of communicable diseases as well as infection mortality and morbidity.
- ❖ Research Studies on effect of health education / awareness programmes in hospitals/ community.

- ❖ To inculcate Lokmnya's values in education of health science discipline regarding qualitative research studies on cultural values and ethical principles among students as well as in community health nursing.
- ❖ In the area of nursing administration and management qualitative research studies can be done, also to control mortality and morbidity in hospitals through control measures which is also related to principles of microbiology .

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