

Omicron - 'Lady of Fatalism' missing but Long Haul Effect is guaranteed!

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SO, it has finally begun 'bucketing down'! It normally takes years to script 'overnight success' but not for the wild and woolly Corona virus! It has, a pound to a penny, learnt the deceptive art of trademarking its success at short frequencies! It is certainly not that it does not find its 'knickers' in twist while mutating but lightning speed is its overweening characteristic! And this is so when it knows for cocksure that speed often trumps perfection! But it does not mind flinging its cap over the windmill at the stage of rapid mutations! And the errors committed in the process give birth to a ferocious monster which has been pounding a mega part of the earth **a la** the US and Europe and is about to do the same to the remaining landscape which is known for 'all hat and no cattle' **a la** many Asian countries, including India! Aha! Things are coming out true for the catastrophists! The New Year of 2022 has rolled out with unyielding promise of fatigue and intrigue!

Going by the skyrocketing mountains of cases, leaving behind the previous peaks of 'Kilimanjaro', it would be unfair to conclude that the Omicron variant is not a worthy successor of Delta! Going by the empirical statistics of fewer hospitalisations vis-a-vis the Delta, I do not confront hesitancy in observing that the new variant is a little kinder to humanity! Though it also bullwhips the existing health infrastructure, the pandemic-weary medical workers and other Corona warriors but it shows greater respect for human lives! If nitwittery is committed by the unvaccinated souls because of one's 'vax-bigotry' and a life is lost owing to one's voodooed behaviour, it would be unfair to put the blame on Omicron. Though it 'hoovers up' fewer lives but it ruthlessly tears down all the support systems created by mankind to save lives! Thus, it proves to be no less grotesque than the Delta and puts human lives in serious jeopardy!

A good case to say so is that of the United States of America which has recorded an elephantine number of over 50 lakh cases in 10 days! For data-crunchers, Europe is no less intriguing and swooning! It all started with UK, then Germany and now France, Italy and Spain. Omicron is ruefully dancing at their throats! Having literally experienced the run in South Africa before its walk in Europe, its numbers have not only gone through the roof but a good number of anti-vaxxers have also succumbed to death! The percentage of unvaccinated population continues to be pretty high in Europe but anti-vaxxers hardly suffer from 'anorexia' to issue death threats to their elected leaders! France stands 'stocky' and tall on this front!

Anyway, thanks to the muted virulence and fewer fatalism 'ignited' by the Omicron, no government, particularly in the developed countries, has slouched into another round of lockdowns! Having seen the Forrester Effect of the pent-up demand on the supply chain and a thick book of jeremiad from the workers and the consumers, many rich countries have leaned more on the vaccine pass rather than clamping down on smorgasbord of snarls! Lakhs of cases are being reported on daily basis but neither the US nor France nor UK has imposed official restrictions. YES, a good percentage of retailers have themselves shuttered their shops to avoid getting infected but experts say that it is one variant which would in any case infect all even if one remains shut at home!

And this is what has been imported as a **mantra**

by many local governments in India. Delhi initially acted righteously by thinning out the gatherings but soon, very strangely, amended the protocols to allow 100% occupancy of buses and metros! In lieu of it, Delhi Government has opted for weekend curfew. I am yet to fathom this gothic barter system!

If the objective was to cork the rapidly swelling positivity rate, then limited snarls were required. However, in a fit of administrative schizophrenia, it rolled up its sleeves as if it is about to outfox the viral 'fox'! If one goes by the New York example of 53% positivity rate, 'Mr Goofus' in Indian politics needs to realise that putting no snarls for the general public would be akin to triggering blue on blue!

Elsewhere in India, the story remains no less bizarre as there is hardly any diminishing effect on the number of election rallies in as many as four States! This is more so when the Allahabad High Court has called for deferring the polls by a couple of months! The Chief Election Commissioner recently cooed that their **tete-a-tete** with all the political parties failed to water down their gangrenous tendency to grab powers at any cost! Worse, even if the cost is loss of life

for the poor! Election is indeed a horrendous game in democracy and all political parties cherish this syndrome of 'gaming disorder'! People's lives come later! No hump or bump on the pathway to power can slow down their pace to grab it! In other words, India is heading for a period of voodooism where its frail hospitals are creakingly going to be overwhelmed and a large number of medical workers may test positive in befitting response to abnormally high transmissibility of the Omicron variant!

What may even trigger another round of scary death curve is the missing dose of booster which has been scientifically established to be assisting antibodies in blocking infections. Antibody acquired through jabs enables the human body to shoo away the pathogen but what really helps is the T cell in the bone marrow. T cells work on the entire body to kill infected cells and thus robustly battles out the spike protein of the virus. As per one study, T cells were found as radioactive today as it was in 2003 after SARS pounded many countries. This unarguably establishes the importance of the booster dose for which all governments caring for their citizens should certainly go for. One unmistakable reason for rapid spread of Omicron is the diminishing antibody as the shelf-life of all vaccines developed thus far is only about six-months. So, if antibodies dip, they leave unshut windows for the pathogen to infect

. Once infection enters the body, the T Cells lock horns to eliminate the infected cells. If the host has comorbidities, the battle may be won by the pathogen in terms of severity of the illness. This clearly explains why hospitalisation is low in case of Omicron.

But what should worry humanity is the recent scientific finding that the sneaky virus, within days, takes a leisurely promenade from the airways to the heart, brain and almost all vital organs in the body and may reign for months . A study conducted by the US National Institutes of Health reveals that the pathogen is capable of replicating in human cells well beyond the respiratory tract. Though this paper is yet to be peer-reviewed but it indicates why long COVID may trigger after months even in people who had mild or asymptomatic infection. In other words, Omicron may not be feared because of its mild behaviour or propensity to cause fewer hospitalisation but one ought to be afraid of the capability of the virus to home in inside our brain causing 'brain fog' or replicating in our liver or kidney quietly and doing long-term damage. Worse, unlike other variants in the past which were positively discriminating in favour of our children, Omicron does not follow the same doctrine and tends to act against the cushion of its standard alibis that it is milder and, therefore, need not spare even the children! Over two lakh children are reported to have been infected in the US. Though vaccination has begun for them in many countries but what may worry parents are the long-haul symptoms of COVID!

Even as Omicron rides the crest of the 'omniconic' wave in many parts of the world and may soon invade the remaining landscape but what has arrested the attention of evolutionary biologists is the detection of yet another new variant with as many as 46 mutations and 37 deletions in its genome configuration. Named 'IHU', the 'fitness' of the new variant is being closely analysed to assay its transmissibility and severity of illness. Though it has infected only 12 persons so far but its potential to upset the apple cart of projections about the expiry year of the pandemic is still being assessed. Since it has not been detected in any other country, the WHO has not issued any alert thus far. However, it ought to be kept in mind that viruses are known for their inherent strength to mutate and each new mutant has so far shown extraordinary resilience. It rapidly adapts itself to acquire immune escape ability. Scientists have found that viruses do not mutate to become milder or attenuated - one of the flawed presumptions behind the prognosis of COVID-19 soon turning endemic!

In other words, new variants tend to render existing vaccines less effective and the world needs to quickly develop a new jab! By the time a new vaccine is developed and jabbed, the virus comes up with a new **avataar** with tangier spike protein! Such a deadly cycle cannot be pulverised completely unless the entire global population is fully jabbed! Oh, hell! What to do with vaccine inequity and also iniquities? A savage battle, indeed! Since this is an impossible task as a time lag imperatively exists in this scenario, any talk of the pandemic becoming endemic in the foreseeable future is fuzzily speculative and akin to groping in the dark ! It is not going to run to seed so soon! It may relent, perhaps only after it has won its weight in oysters! Till then let's smile with capped teeth and brace for a daily diet of outrage and new variants (WHO is very confident about) which may be named 'Pi' or 'Sigma'. Let's also hope that it peters out when the Greek alphabet also exhausts with 'Omega'! Oh pooh! Will time to loosen up buttoned-up collar tick fast?