

PROGRAMME

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR
Webinar On

UNDERSTANDING EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS IN HISTORY AND SOCIETY

ON MAY 2, 2020 TIME: 11.30 AM TO 1.30 PM
(On Google meet)

- Introduction:** Prof. Amandeep Bal, Head, Department of History
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
'Epidemics, Pandemics and Covid-19' (11:30 am to 11:35 am)
- Keynote Address:** Prof. Sukhdev Singh Sohal (Former Professor) Department of History,
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
(11:35 am to 12: 05pm)
- Panelists:** Dr. Ruby Bala, Assistant Professor, B. L. M. Girls College, Nawansher.
'Plague Epidemic in the Punjab(1897-1920)' (12:05pm to 12:15pm)
- Dr. Raj Kumar, Assistant Professor, Dev Samaj College for Women, Ferozpur
'Diseases and Indian Soldiers: Life in the Trenches during Great War (1914-18)'
(12:15pm to 12:30pm)
- Dr. Ruby Bala, Assistant Professor, B. L. M. Girls College, Nawansher.
'Coming of Influenza Epidemic(1918-19) in Punjab (12:30pm to 12:40pm)
- Prof. Jagroop Singh Sekhon(Former Professor) Department of Political Science,
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
'COVID 19: State Response and its Implications' (12:40pm to 01:00pm)
- Session for Question & Answers**
(1:00pm to 1:25pm)
- Concluding Remarks:** Prof. Sarbjot Singh Behl, Dean Academic Affairs, Guru Nanak Dev
University, Amritsar

Director
Prof. Amandeep Bal

Coordinator & Moderator I- Dr. Harneet Kaur
Moderator II -Dr. Shefali Chuahan

UNDERSTANDING EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS IN HISTORY AND SOCIETY

Concept Note

Health and disease are part of human society. Across the ages, human beings have struggled hard to maintain wellness of human body and mind. Human endurance and ingenuity has succeeded to overcome maladies and diseases turning into epidemics and pandemics. The current spate of Covid-19 throughout the world has once again shocked and jolted the world to think that we the humans are biologically fragile and have not yet overcome epidemics. The Covid-19 is crippling the social fabric and economic structure of the comity of nations irrespective of the standards of living and economic might of these nations. All the nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) are grappling with the current crisis in search of exit and relief from the pandemic. It is high time to revisit our distant and near past and contemporary situation with a view to find out the criticality of earlier epidemics and pandemics. One of the advantages of studying history is that we always find moments in the past when the things were equally worse and frightening. It also tells us that the humans have survived in the past and have reached at the higher levels of health and wellness with better medical and material resources and are bound to overcome the present calamity.

Recurrent epidemics were regular features in the world history. Historical evidence shows that the Egyptians faced epidemics about 5000 years ago. Epidemics of Plague, Cholera, Smallpox, Malaria and fevers have ravaged social groups and societies worldwide killing people in millions. Human migration, commercial exchanges facilitated by increased means of transportation transformed the local diseases into epidemics and pandemics. The Black Death in the mid 14th century AD had wiped out one third of the population Europe in four years creating major demographic and economic crises in the medieval Europe.

It is no surprise that social distancing became a norm without the governments urging it. The quarantine was essential for traders to ward off the possibility of an epidemic. Public authorities took drastic measure to isolate the sick. The problem with the epidemics was not only the high rate of mortality, but break down of the administrative structure of the state and economy. It was in response to the recurrent epidemics that public health and sanitation emerged as the responsibility of the modern state.

India has not been free of the epidemics. The medieval India faced epidemics and the state introduced measures such as indigenous medicine, running free kitchens, providing shelters and giving *taccavi* loans to help the needy. However, its intensity increased after the establishment of British rule with fast means of transportation and shifting of groups of people for trade, commercial, economic and administrative purposes. Contacts with foreigners were equally responsible for the fast spread of the viruses and epidemics. The process of colonization of Indian resources brought in heavy exports causing scarcities. Droughts and famines caused large scale malnutrition among the poor who became easy prey to local diseases, epidemics and pandemics. Pandemics like plague and influenza arrived from abroad through ships and caused havoc in India. The pandemics killed the people in millions effecting social fabric and economic structure. The colonial state introduced legislation like the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897, brought in quarantine measures, inoculation, vaccination etc. These steps have been documented in Plague, Malaria, Smallpox and Cholera Reports with recommendations for proper sanitation. After Independence, vast medical and health infrastructure has been built. We are better prepared than earlier times and it is time to show endurance to cope with crisis.

The students and faculty of the Department of History have worked on the Epidemics of plague, smallpox and influenza Pandemic (1918), and medicine during the colonial rule in the Punjab. The present Webinar attempts to look at the epidemics and pandemics which had plagued India, particularly the Punjab in the past two hundred years.

Amandeep Bal (Prof.)
Chairperson