

Emerging complexities of SARS-CoV-2 pandemic

“In my discussions with the team (of WHO visiting China), they expressed the difficulties they encountered in accessing raw data. I expect future collaborative studies to include more timely and comprehensive data sharing.” – WHO Director General’s remarks at the member state briefing on the report of the international team studying the origins of SARS-CoV-2, Dated Mar 30, 2021

Dear Editor,

Neha Sharma *et al.* write a review article on combating COVID-19 pandemic in India and demystify the concept of herd immunity in April 2021 issue of the journal. They examine various myths/controversies around herd immunity and dispel them by several reasoned arguments.^[1]

Under the heading, “Why bother for herd immunity in the Indian Covid 19 context?”, the authors state that to achieve it, there should be a single host species to which the disease agent is limited. However, now evidence is emerging that the novel Coronavirus 2019 has been detected in various animals. US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a webpage with a title, ‘Covid-19 and Animals’, and here the agency enlists various animals, farms, and incidences when the novel Coronavirus has been detected. As SARS-CoV-2 has been found in farmed mink worldwide, CDC provides *Mink Guidance* on this page.^[2] The news has been appearing in various journals around the globe since origin of the pandemic to further look into the matter and assess its significance.^[3]

What is the value of the spread of the novel Coronavirus across barriers of species, perhaps we will know in retrospect only. Another curious property of the SARS-CoV-2 detected by researchers at the University of Hong Kong is that although this novel virus does not infect bat cell lines but its predecessors do. At present commonly postulated theory of origin of the virus is that it jumped species from bat to man through as-yet-unidentified intermediate -host, hence it’s categorized under zoonotic illness.

But when scientists tried to grow it on bat cell lines, it failed to grow there.^[4] What we infer is that there are a lot of gaps in

our knowledge regarding evolution of the virus and joining the dots will enhance our database and provide us the best tools to control it. By studying growth of virus in various cell culture lines, we can decipher that from where did it come and then we may chart its future trajectory.

Second, under a heading, “Is there any empirical evidence from international arena that herd immunity works/does not work?”, the authors write that in India, an Aadhar implementation (program) triggered a backlash from citizens. Here, we need to learn that in this era of cyberterrorism, cybercrimes, data theft, hacking of various devices resulting in payment of ransom in cryptocurrency; any humongous online program such as at the scale of vaccination should be implemented after thorough scrutiny only. And after public awakening, our government cancelled the scheme and stated that no one will be denied any vaccine, hospital bed, medicine or any other medical service because they do not have Aadhar.^[5]

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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I accessed all the webpages at the time of submitting this letter to the Editor.

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