



UNANI PERSPECTIVE ON COVID-19: HISTORICAL INSIGHTS, IMMUNITY MODULATION AND SYMPTOMATIC MANAGEMENT

Preventive & Social Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Background: - COVID-19, an infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, emerged in December 2019 and rapidly became a global pandemic. Although COVID-19 is not directly mentioned in classical Unani literature, its symptomatology resembles conditions such as Nazla e Wabai and Humma e Wabai. Unani medicine, based on holistic principles and temperamental balance, offers both preventive and therapeutic strategies that align with modern understanding of disease prevention and immunity enhancement and is well documented epidemic conditions in Unani medicine. **Objective:** - To explore the Unani perspective on epidemic diseases and highlight its preventive and therapeutic approaches relevant to COVID-19-like illnesses. **Methods:** - A review of classical Unani texts and current recommendations were explored. Symptoms of COVID-19 were compared with those described under Nazla e Wabai and Amraz e Muta'ddiya. Immunity enhancer drugs and compound formulations recommended in the Unani system were compiled. Preventive, dietary and symptomatic management strategies were included, with particular focus on elderly care and general hygiene practices. **Results:** - Unani medicine attributes epidemics to environmental imbalances affecting bodily humours. The concept of Tabiyat Mudabbira e Badan underlines the body's innate healing capacity. Several single herbs (e.g., Zanjabeel, Asgand) and compound preparations (e.g. Khameera Marwareed, Tiryag e Wabai) are recommended for immune support and symptom management. Dietary guidance, stress relief and hygiene practices are integral to Unani prophylaxis. **Conclusion:** - Unani medicine offers a holistic approach to epidemic management, focusing on prevention, immunity modulation and symptomatic care. These interventions may serve as complementary strategies in pandemic situations like COVID-19.

KEYWORDS

Unani medicine; COVID-19; Immunomodulator; Epidemic; Pandemic; Nazla e Wabai; Waba

COVID-19 AND UNANI MEDICINE

COVID-19 is a newly emerged infectious disease that is not specifically mentioned in Unani literature. However, the symptoms associated with COVID-19 such as fever, headache, dry cough, sore throat, muscle pain, nasal irritation, general discomfort, difficulty breathing, extreme thirst, loss of appetite, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and rapid pulse are similar to Nazla e Wabai and Humma e Wabai which are well described in classical Unani texts.^{1,2,3}

The World Health Organization (WHO) initially aware of this novel virus on December 31, 2019, after receiving a notification about a group of instances of "viral pneumonia" in Wuhan, China. As of August 11, 2024, the WHO has reported a total of 775,917,102 global cases and 7,058,381 deaths worldwide. Among these, India alone has reported 533,626 deaths^{4,5,6,7,8} Ajmal Khan (1868-1927 AD) observed that nazla and zukam could spread epidemically, referring to these conditions as nazla wa zukam e wabai and he associated them with influenza. He stated that just as plague, cholera and other epidemic diseases can sweep through populations like Nazla e Wabai also. Modern research has shown that sometimes outbreaks of cold and flu can also occur as epidemic.³

In Unani literature, the term ufoonat refers to infection, while infectious diseases are termed as Amraz e muta' ddiya. Epidemics are known by the term waba and the diseases that occur during a 'waba' are referred to as Amraz e muta' ddiya. The term waba is defined as putrefied changes in the air, water, soil or environment, leading to an alteration in the homeostasis of humours, thereby promoting the putrefaction of humours within the body in a large population over a very short period. When an infectious disease spreads across a wide geographic area globally, it is called waba e umumi, which is synonymous with a pandemic.¹

Najeebuddin Samarqandi described the key symptoms of nazla e wabaiya, including sneezing, nasal irritation, sore throat, fever and malaise. Patients might also experience cough, diarrhoea and delirium and in severe cases, complications such as pneumonia and pleurisy could arise. Additionally, some patients may suffer from hoarseness, throat pain, difficulty in breathing, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and headaches, which closely resembles influenza-like illness and COVID-19-like infections.⁹ According to Unani theory, when the

quality or quantity of any humor or the balance between them, is disrupted, a pathological condition arises. Tabiyat (physis or nature), also known as tabiyat al-insaniyah (human nature) or tabiyat al-mudabbira e badan, is regarded as the supreme planner and healer of the body. Ibn Sina (980-1037 AD) posited that tabiyat addresses the underlying causes of health and illness in ways that go beyond the microbic and related theories. The homeostasis of each cell, tissue, organ and system is maintained by tabiyat through various mechanisms, primarily Quwat e tabiyah (natural faculties), Quwat e haywaniyah (vital faculties) and Quwat e nafsaniyah (mental faculties). These faculties regulate, control and restore the normal functions of each organ and system, assist in modulating the immune system and help to produce resistance against diseases.¹⁰

Covid- 19 And Quwate Man'aat (Immunity)

In Unani medicine, the immune system is explained through the concept of Tabiyat Mudabbira e Badan, the internal governing power of the body that preserves health and fights disease. When Tabiyat is strong, the body resists infections and restores balance naturally. The immunity (Quwate e Mana'at) is not a separate entity but an integrated function of the body, governed by:

- **Quwat-e-Tabiyah (Natural faculty):-** It helps in digestion, metabolism and elimination of waste.
- **Quwat e Haywaniyah (Vital force):-** It is related to heart, circulation and rooh, gives strength and vitality.
- **Quwat e Nafsaniyah (Psychic faculty):-** It maintains mental balance and stress response.

In the Unani system of medicine, tabiyat mudabbira e badan is regarded as the supreme planner and healer of the body. It is responsible for maintaining equilibrium within the body's internal environment and ensuring the normal functioning of cells, tissues and organs. This concept closely parallels the body's defence mechanisms, commonly known as the immune system. There are so many drugs in Unani system of medicine claimed as immuno-modulator, immunity booster and immunity enhancer like Ma'ul Sha'eer, half fry egg, Chicken soup, Almonds, Walnut etc. It is also advised to consume citrus and sour fruits, especially grapes, apples, lemon etc. Oxymer prepared with Arqe Gulab is believed to provide effective protection during epidemics. Qurse Zahar mohra, Habbe Jadwar, Tiryag e wabai, Tiryag e farooq, Tiryag e Arba, Tiryag e Nazli, Tiryag e Mashridutes and Gile Armani etc. are well advocated in epidemic/pandemic/waba to

maintain and boost the immunity.¹¹

Prophylactic Approach: In Unani medicine, health is maintained through a balance of four bodily humours (Akhlāt). Disease occurs when there is a disturbance in the quality or quantity of these humours due to internal or external factors. Epidemic diseases (Amraz e Wabaiya) are believed to result from ufoonat (infection) and tassurrat e kharijia (external influences) such as polluted air, water, place or seasonal variations. The Unani concept of Hifzan e Sehat (preservation of health) plays a central role in disease prevention. It emphasizes maintaining the body's internal environment through proper diet (Ghiza), lifestyle (Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya - six essential factors) and preventive drug use (Tadabeer e Wabai). In the context of COVID-19 or similar respiratory infections, this aligns with modern prophylaxis i.e. prevention before infection occurs.

There are few drugs indicated to be used in COVID-19 like symptoms are categorised into Mufrad Advia (Single drugs) and Murakkab Advia (Compound drugs)

Unani Single Drugs^{12,13}

- Behi dana (Cydonia oblonga): 3-5 gm
- Unnab (Zizyphus jujuba): 5 pcs.
- Sapistan (Cordia myxa): 9 pcs.
- Karanjwa (Caesalpinia bonducella): 3-5 gm

Unani Compound Drugs¹³

- Khameera Marwareed
- SafoofAsgand

Unani Immunity Enhancers: There are so many drugs which have been prescribed in Unani medicine which certain lead on immunomodulatory effects have been reported.

Single Drugs^{12,13}

- Zanjabeel / Adrak (Zingiber officinale)
- Asgand (Withania somnifera)
- Amla (Embllica officinalis)
- Gilo (Tinospora cordifolia)
- Sibr / Lahsun (Allium sativum)
- Anjeer (Ficus carica)
- Zafran (Crocus sativus)
- Shoniz / Kalonji (Nigella sativa)
- Zard Chob / Haldi (Curcuma longa)
- Zaitoon (Olea europaea)
- Rehan (Ocimum sanctum)
- Rumman (Punica granatum)
- Badranjboya (Mellisa officinalis)
- Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri)
- Badam Shirin (Prunus amygdalus)
- Sahjen (Moringa olifera)
- Gurmar (Gymnema sylvestre)
- Sibr / Gheekawar (Aloe vera)
- Musli Safaid (Chlorophytum borivilianum)
- Aslussoos / Mulethi (Glycyrrhiza glabra)
- Halela (Terminalia chebula)

Compound Drugs:

- Khameera Marwareed: 3-5 g twice a day
- Khamira Gaozaban Ambri Jadwar ood Saleb Wala.
- Khamira Abresham Hakim Arshad Wala.
- Tiryaq e Arba: 3-5 gm
- Tiryaq e wabai (not recommended in diabetics patients)
- Asgand (Safoof): 5gm
- Make powder of Zafran, Sibr, Murmaki (in case of diabetic patients).

Local Application: In case of respiratory discomfort or chest pain, local application of Roghan e Baboona Sada on chest is advocated.

Inhalation: Arq e Ajeeb 2-5 drops.^{12,13}

Symptomatic Approach ¹³			
Symptoms	Drugs	Dose	
		Age: 6-12 yrs	Age: Above 12 yrs
Dry Cough	Habbe Surfa (125-250 mg)	125 mg (pill) BD	250 mg (pill) BD

High Fever	Khamira Banafsha	5 gm BD	10 gm BD
	Laoq Sapistan	5 gm BD	10 gm BD
	Sharbate Sadr	10 ml BD	20 ml BD
	Habbe Bukhar	250 mg (pill) BD	500 mg (pill) BD
Sore Throat	Habbe Mubarak (1-2 gm)	1 gm (pill) BD	2 gm (pill) BD
	Sharbat Toot Siyah	10 ml BD	20 ml BD
Difficulty in Breathing	Laoq Katan	5 gm BD	10 gm BD
	Habbe Hindi Zeeqi	125 mg (pill) BD	250 mg (pill) BD

Compound drugs like Khamira Banafsha, Laoq Sapistan, Sharbate Sadr, Sharbate Toot Siyah and Laoq Katan are not recommended for diabetic patients as this compound formulation contains high amount of honey or Sugar or Jaggery.¹³

Specific Recommendations¹³

Symptomatic Relief In Upper Respiratory Tract Infections:

- Behi dana
- Unnab
- Sapistan
- Karanjwa
- Habbe Surfa
- Khamirae Banafsha
- Laoq Sapistan
- Sharbate Sadr
- Habbe Bukhar
- Habbe Mubarak
- Sharbate Toot Siyah
- Laoq Katan
- Habbe Hindi Zeeqi

Special Care For Elderly: Unani Medicine categorizes the elderly people under Abdan e Zaefa (weaker bodies). Such population may have higher susceptibility for acquiring different illnesses. General guidelines are provided for maintaining their health.

- The diet should be in accordance with Mizaj (Temperament)
- Nutritive and easily digestible diet should be taken
- Frequent meals in small quantity
- Avoid drinking of cold water
- Maintain good bowel habits
- Maintain adequate sleep
- Perform moderate exercises¹³

General Measures Which Should Be Followed During Epidemic/ Pandemic

- Maintain social distancing
- Frequent washing of hands with soap and water and use of alcohol-based sanitizer
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- Use of multi layered face mask
- Practice good respiratory hygiene
- Maintain sanitation and general hygiene
- Isolation of vulnerable population like elderly people, pregnant women and people having co-morbid conditions such as hypertension and diabetes mellitus.
- Stress relieving measures are equally important to follow. Certain Unani drugs like Saa'd Koofi (Cyperus rotundus), Ood Saleb (Paconia emodi) and Jadwar (Delphinium denudatum) may be beneficial.
- Fumigation (Bakhoor) of the house at frequent intervals with combination of Sandal (Santalum album) and Kafoor (Cinnamomum camphora)¹³

CONCLUSION

Unani medicine enhances immunity not by targeting a single organ, but by **restoring holistic balance**, purifying the body and strengthening tabiyat, the natural healing force. All above herbs and formulations act as **immuno-modulators, tonics, blood purifiers and adaptogens**, making them valuable in both prevention and management of infectious diseases like COVID-19.

Disclosure Statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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