



Original Research Article

Curbing Covid-19- role of the Traditional Dorbar

Deswyn G Marbaniang^{1,*}, Stepbaphyrnai Lyngdoh¹

¹Dept. of Chemistry, Lady Keane College, Shillong, Meghalaya, India



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ABSTRACT

The Traditional Dorbar has existed in Meghalaya among the Khasis from time immemorial. It is a unique democratic body which is by the people, of the people and for the people. The Khasi people sit in consultation before taking any collective decision with regard to administration. The Dorbar sits in judgement over cases and concerns brought before it by the citizens and residents relying on the balanced scales of ka riti, that is, the unwritten code of conduct observed and which has been handed down for generations. Every decision taken at the Dorbar is considered sacred as the Dorbar is God's council. At the meeting every adult male member has the right to be heard during the deliberations. The opinion of every member is respected and deliberations can continue till a collective decision is taken.

With the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, the Government of Meghalaya has set up an Institutional Quarantine Centre at Umsawli Village and other places in East Khasi Hills District to quarantine its residents but was found to be insufficient. The Traditional Dorbar were requested to help out and the Traditional Dorbar of Lower Lumphrang, Shillong situated in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, India responded by setting up two Community Quarantine Centres for its residents.

Through this study, we can see that the Dorbar always function in consultation with its residents to get their consensus in a true democratic sense. The Dorbar could always garner the support of the residents.

The Dorbar could remove the fears, stigma and misconception about Covid-19 among its residents by organizing a special meeting where representatives from the Health department were present to address any queries about Covid-19. The Dorbar also published and distribute pamphlets about Covid-19 to sensitize the residents about Covid-19. The Dorbar seems to believe that knowledge is power and knowledge brings freedom.

It was observed that during the quarantine period in the two quarantine centres, the Persons Under Quarantine (PUQ's) were never discriminated or treated as second class citizen. Infact, there were some PUQ's who request to be allowed to complete their quarantine period in the centre itself. This is a shot in the arm of Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumphrang, Shillong for the management of Quarantine Centres.

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1. Introduction

The Traditional Dorbar has existed in Meghalaya among the Khasis from time immemorial. It is a unique democratic body which is by the people, of the people and for the people.

The concept of Dorbar, that is, the council, is an important part of a Khasi's collective life. The Dorbar is

closely associated with a Khasi from his hearth to his clan, to his village, commune and even to his state. The Khasi people sit in consultation before taking any collective decision with regard to administration. The Dorbar sits in judgement over cases and concerns brought before it by the citizens and residents relying on the balanced scales of ka riti, that is, the unwritten code of conduct observed and which has been handed down for generations. Every decision taken at the Dorbar is considered sacred as the Dorbar is God's council. This observation signifies the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: desgormarbs@gmail.com (D. G. Marbaniang).

reverence the Khasi have for the institution of Dorbar. The Dorbar Shnong comprises of all the adult male residents, ki Rangbah, of the village who are permitted to attend Dorbar meetings. Every Rangbah inducted in the village council is a life member. The Dorbar Shnong has as its head a Tymmen Shnong or a Rangbah Shnong, that is, the village headman entrusted with administrative responsibilities falling within the jurisdiction of the village. At the meeting every adult male member has the right to be heard during the deliberations. The opinion of every member is respected and deliberations can continue till a collective decision is taken. Approval of a decision is indicated by a nod or the raising of hands. Every decision taken at the village council meeting is revered. In conducting himself at the village council meeting every member present must maintain Ka Akor-Ka Burom, that is, etiquette and manners. Personal attack by way of words, while disagreeing with viewpoints is a serious violation of etiquette and manners. Members who indulge in such attacks may be suspended or debarred from attending future meetings.¹

Covid-19 which is a disease cause by the SAR-CoV-2 corona virus has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization and since the declaration; it has affected more than 200 countries world-wide.

At the time of writing this article, India is rank third in the world as a country with the most number of covid-19 cases with 3,621,245 confirmed cases out of which 2,774,801 have recovered and there are 781,975 active cases and with a death count of 64,469. The cases are spread all throughout its different States and Union Territories.

As one of the States in India, Meghalaya, the abode of clouds is not spared from this pandemic and has as many as 2343 confirmed cases out of which 1049 have recovered and with a death count of 10.²

The Government of Meghalaya has set up an Institutional Quarantine Centre at Umsawli Village and other places in East Khasi Hills District to quarantine its residents. But, because, people are returning back to the state in large numbers and since the Institutional Quarantine Centre has a limited capacity, the Government sought the help and cooperation of the Traditional Dorbar of different localities to set up Community Quarantine Centres in order to contain the spread of Covid-19.

The Traditional Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumphang, Shillong situated in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, India responded by setting up two Community Quarantine Centres for its residents.

In this study, we will try to understand the functioning of the Traditional Dorbar in curbing Covid-19, methods use to allay fears, stigma and misconception among the residents about Covid-19 and the process of managing quarantine centres.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data

Data were collected from the Office of the Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumphang, Shillong and from the two quarantine centres (via. interview of staffs and Persons Under Quarantine (PUQ's) and documents available). The study was conducted from the period of 19th May, 2020 to 25th June, 2020. A total of 10 persons were quarantine during this period. The states from which these persons under quarantine returned back are from Chennai; Tamil Nadu, Bangalore; Karnataka, Karimganj; Assam, Mysore; Karnataka, Candolin; North Goa, Mumbai; Maharashtra and Ahmedabad; Gujarat. Some of these states have been identified as Covid-19 hotspots.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Creating awareness and seeking consensus

Before, the request from the government to set up quarantine centres, the Dorbar is already involved in various Covid-19 related relief works. Like, providing food ration for the poor and the needy in the locality who were impacted by the lock down order as they could not attend their normal duties and are therefore running short of food supplies. The Dorbar took upon itself the task to see that no one goes to bed hungry. To accomplish this huge task the Dorbar invited the participation of all the residents to donate (cash or kind) to meet the needs of the under privilege in the locality. A meeting was called and everyone present unanimously agreed to be part of this humanitarian effort. Through the support of the residents the mission was accomplished.

In connection with the setting up of quarantine centres, the first and foremost task of the Dorbar was to get the consensus of all the residents of the locality. So, on 9th May, 2020, the Dorbar through its Headman, organized a meeting with representatives from each households and had a threadbare discussion on the issue at hand. Representatives from the Health Department and the Police Department were also present during the meeting to enlighten the residents about Covid-19 and its prevention. The meeting witness an active exchange of thoughts about Covid-19 and about the proposed setting up of quarantine centres, and in the end, the residents gave their approval to set up the two centres.

The Dorbar published a pamphlet on Covid-19 in Khasi vernacular (local common language) and distributed to the residents of the locality to allay any fear, stigma and misconception that may exist about Covid-19 and the setting up of Quarantine Centre's in the locality.

3.2. Setting up of the quarantine centres

The Dorbar identified two secondary schools for setting up of two quarantine centres. After permission was taken from

the managing committees of the two schools, the schools were sanitized and prepared for occupancy.

3.3. Appointment of staffs for the quarantine centres

The Dorbar make sure that the two centres had 24/7 attending staffs for the welfare of the persons under quarantine. The Dorbar appointed four camp manager for the two centres along with a Supervisor and 5 volunteers (2 males and 3 female) nominated by the government. The salary of the camp managers was borne by the Dorbar. The Dorbar also extended financial honorarium to the 5 volunteers.

3.4. Training of staffs

The next task of the Dorbar was to train the staffs in managing the quarantine centres. For this, an interaction session of all the appointed staffs with the government appointed supervisor was arranged where a threadbare discussion on the management of quarantine centres took place. This was followed by hands on training during the initial day of the quarantine period till the staffs gain confidence in dealing with the PUQ's. The stress was always on the importance to cultivate the habit of wearing masks at all times, washing of hands with soap and water at regular intervals and maintaining physical distance with PUQs and with other staffs in the centre. Awareness write-up about Covid-19 and precautions were given to the PUQs on the day of admission to the centre.

3.5. Assignment of duties to the staffs in the quarantine centres

Through the training imparted by the Supervisor, the staffs and volunteers were trained to perform the following tasks:

3.5.1. Role in serving food items

The food items for the PUQs are prepared by their own family members. The family members would first deliver the food to the staffs of the centre who in turn will deliver the food to the PUQs. While delivering the food items, the PUQs and staffs were always impressed upon the need to wear masks, gloves and maintain physical distance with each other.

3.5.2. Role as a trainer

During the quarantine period, the staffs would see that the PUQs in the centre are keeping themselves fit and healthy by doing exercises. The Dorbar instructed the staffs to play the role of a physical trainer and lead the residents into few stretching and cardio work out while maintaining physical distancing.

3.5.3. Role in providing physical & psychological care

During the quarantine period, the staffs would see that the PUQs in the centre are coping with the stress of being away from their loved ones. In this connection, the staffs would interact with the residents to know about their Physical Health (if any complaint, the government medical team would be informed) and psychological needs (if a resident seems to be distraught, the supervisor would be informed for a counseling session with the resident concern). The Dorbar has made an arrangement with the Lumparing Urban Health Centre to carryout daily health check up of all PUQ's and the staffs from the health centre would perform the duty assign.

3.5.4. Role as a sanitation worker

3.5.4.1. Cleaning & disinfecting. During the quarantine period, the Supervisor, the managers and the volunteers would see that the rooms and the surroundings of the quarantine centre is kept clean at all times. In this connection, the staffs never shy away from performing the role as House Keepers. The PUQs were also encouraged to clean and disinfect their own rooms.

3.5.4.2. Laundry service. In order to wash the PUQ clothing, the worn clothes, bed sheets, pillow covers, etc were first disinfected by soaking them in 0.5% hypochlorite solution for 20 minutes. The disinfected clothing is then transferred to PUQ's homes for further washing. The family members are instructed to immediately soak the disinfected clothing along with the carrying bag in detergent water for another 20 minutes before washing.

3.5.5. Role as an office manager

During the quarantine period, all the staffs would be involved in managing the office and documenting all the activities that is taking place in the quarantine centre on a daily basis. The activities that were documented are as follows:

1. Registration of all the residents is done whose details are properly maintained.
2. Stock updates of the materials supplied to the centre and materials issued to the residents.
3. Attendance of all the staffs is recorded on a daily basis.
4. Daily census of the residents present in the camp is recorded.
5. Daily health record of all the residents as diagnosed by the camp manager and medical intervention by the government medical team.
6. Recording of all the person visiting the centre for official purpose or any other reasons.
7. Daily clinical and Examination report of the PUQ's is documented for future reference.
8. Photographic evidence of the activities in the camp is kept and maintained
9. Release of PUQ's.

3.5.6. Role in management of wastes

All wastes that were generated from the quarantine centres are treated as Bio-medical Wastes (BMW). However, the wastes are classified into two types- BMW-1 (PPE, pens, ruler, water bottles, metallic materials, etc used by the PUQ's and the staffs alike) and BMW-2 (Disposable food containers, wrappers, plastic bags, etc). The wastes (BMW-1 and BMW-2) are separately collected by the volunteers in two differently coloured biodegradable eco-bags and kept in a designated locked storage room till they are collected by specialized Bio-medical Wastes personnel from the Shillong Municipality Board for disposal. The personnel from the Shillong Municipality Board would come and collect the wastes twice in a week.

3.5.7. Release of PUQ's

After 13 days of quarantine in the centre, the PUQ's are re-tested for the presence of the Corona virus. After getting the report, if the result is negative, they are released from the centre with an instruction to carry out another 14 days Home Quarantine. While releasing, proper instruction is given to them to continue the habit of wearing masks at all times, washing their hands with soap and water at regular intervals and maintain physical distance with members of their families. Release certificates were issued to them which were counter signed by the Centre Supervisor and the Headman of the Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumparing, Shillong. If, however the result is positive, the PUQ's are shifted to the Institutional Quarantine Centre of the Government for Isolation and Treatment.

4. Role of the Dorbar Shnong

The Headman and all the Executive Members of the Dorbar, were instrumental in the smooth functioning and success of both the Quarantine Centres. The essential materials required for running the centre's (like Sanitizer, gloves, garbage bags, mops, PPE, etc) were provided by the Dorbar and borne from the Dorbar fund. Since the expenses incurred for running the centre was quite high, the Dorbar sought the support of the residents by appealing them to contribute towards the quarantine centre management fund. The residents responded and met the required expenditure needs. There were also many well wishers who gave donations and contributed to this cause.

The executive members would make routine visit to the centres to give instructions and encouragement to the staffs, volunteers and the PUQ's in the two centres. Few PUQ's show positive for the Rapid Diagnostic Anti-body Covid-19 test during the quarantine period, the Dorbar took prompt action by shifting those tested positive to the Institutional Quarantine Centre of the Government, thereby stopping any potential spread of the virus.

5. Limitations Encountered

With little or no funding from the government and being a self finance local body, the Dorbar find it difficult to sustain the operation of the two quarantine centres as there was a lot of financial implications involved. Therefore, the two centres had to be decommissioned on 25th June, 2020 when all the PUQ's were finally released even though the number of positive Covid-19 cases in the state is on the rise.

6. Follow-up Activities

The Dorbar is constantly engaging in the fight against Covid-19. It has made it mandatory for all its residents to follow strictly the protocols laid down for Covid-19 within its jurisdiction. It uses its installed public announcement system to remind everyone that the fight against Covid-19 is still on and that everyone has to be on a high alert. On few occasions, some resident were reported to be Covid-19 positive and in such instance, the Dorbar together with the District Administration would work swiftly to contain the disease and stop it from spreading.

7. Conclusion

Under the dynamic guidance of the Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumparing, Shillong and with the dedication and hard work of all the Staffs and Volunteers in the two centres, the quarantine of the residents of Lower Lumparing who had returned back from different states in India was a success. All the persons under quarantine have been released from the centres on 25th June, 2020. Because of the efficient functioning of the two quarantine centres, there was no community spread of covid-19 in Lower Lumparing, Shillong.

We can see that the Dorbar always function in consultation with its residents to get their consensus in a true democratic sense. The Dorbar could always garner the support of the residents.

The Dorbar could remove the fears, stigma and misconception about Covid-19 among its residents by organizing a special meeting where representatives from the Health department were present to address any queries about Covid-19. The Dorbar also published and distribute pamphlets about Covid-19 to sensitized the residents about Covid-19. The Dorbar seems to believe that knowledge is power and knowledge brings freedom.

The Dorbar was very particular about the functioning of the quarantine centres. The interest of the PUQ's, the staffs, the volunteers and the residents of the locality was always given a priority. The Dorbar understood the impact that Covid-19 can have on the locality if attention to details is not kept.

It was observed that during the quarantine period in the two quarantine centres, the PUQ's were never discriminated or treated as second class citizen. Infact, there were

some PUQ's who request to be allowed to complete their quarantine period in the centre itself. This is a shot in the arm of Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumparing, Shillong for the management of quarantine centres.

The Dorbar Shnong of Lower Lumparing, Shillong is just one of the many Dorbar in East Khasi Hills District who has taken the responsibility to set up quarantine centres in the locality to assist the government in managing the Covid-19 pandemic. It is seen that, whatever, the Dorbar has done has worked. It could curb Covid-19 within its jurisdiction.

8. Source of Funding

None.

9. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

10. Acknowledgement

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Author biography

Deswyn G Marbaniang, Assistant Professor

Stepbaphyrnai Lyngdoh, Student

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