Vol. 1 No. 11 January-December, 2021 ISSN 2231-0592 / Cosmos Impact Factor 5.450 Peer Reviewed Annual Journal of English

## **Editors**

Dr. Shubha R Mishra Dr. Urmila Dabir Dr. Priya Wanjari

A Peer Reviewed Annual Journal of English

**Editors** : Dr. Shubha R. Mishra

(Retd.) Associate Prof. & Head, Dept. of English

Dr. Madhukarrao Wasnik PWS Arts & Commerce, College, Nagpur

Dr. Urmila Dabir

Principal & Head, Dept. of English

Raikumar Kewalramani Kanya Mahayidyalaya, Nagpur

Dr. Priya Wanjari

Principal & Head, Dept. of English, Santaji Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur

Consulting Editors : Dr. Leela Kanal

> (Retd.) Reader & Head. Dept. of English. Bundelkhand (PG) College, Jhansi

Dr. A. K. Singh

Head Dept. of English, R. B. S. College, Agra

#### **Editorial Board**

#### Dr. Prantik Baneriee

Associate Professor

Dept. of English, Hislop College, Nagpur

#### Dr. Pravin Joshi

Director.

Prerna College of Commerce, Nagpur

## Prof. Dr. Varsha Vaidya

HoD (Eng.) Taywade College, Koradi

#### Mr. Sudesh Bhowate

HoD (Eng.) Dr. Madhukarrao Wasnik PWS Arts

& Commerce College, Nagpur

#### Dr. Neehal Sheikh

Assistant Prof. of English,

Santaji Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur

#### Mrs. Aniu Bhutani

Principal, Bhartiya Vidya Bhavans BP Vidya Mandir,

Civil Lines, Nagpur

#### Dr. Renu Dalela

HoD (Eng.)

Principal Arun Rao Kalode Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur

#### Dr. Alka Zade

HoD (Eng.) SGB Mahavidyalaya, Hingna, MS

#### Dr. Madhavi Pimple

Assist. Prof. Dept. of Eng. RKKM Nagpur

#### Dr. Vandana Bhagdikar

Principal, Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur

#### Dr. Kapil Singhel

Associate Prof. Vasantrao Naik Govt. Institute of Arts

Individual Rs. 1300 (Annual)

and Social Science, Nagpur.

#### Address for Communication: Subscription Rates:

Cenacle Institutional Rs. 1500 (Annual)

Website: cenacle.in

Raikumar Kewalramani Kanya Mahayidyalya

Sai Vasanshah Square, Jaripatka Main Road,

Nagpur - 440 014 (Maharashtra State)

Cover Page Design: Tripad Mishra

Published by Cenacle

All rights reserved. Printed by: Aastha Prints, Dosar Square, C.A. Nagpur-18. Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021 ISSN 2231-0592

# cenacle

A Peer Reviewed Annual Journal of English Cosmos Impact Factor 5.450

> Editors Dr. Shubha R. Mishra Dr. Urmila Dabir Dr. Priya Wanjari

## **About Cenacle**

Cenacle is a unique collaborative literary venture, which came into being in 2009. It is unique in many ways. It is a collaborative literary venture of three English departments of three different colleges: namely Dr Madhukarroa Wasnik PWS Arts and Commerce College, Rajkumar Kewalramni Kanya Mahavidyalaya and Santaji Mahavidyalaya, all affiliated to RTM Nagpur University. This group came together to promote teaching and learning of English through various activities. Collaborative literary and academic activities are conducted under the banner of Cenacle. The Departments of English of all the 3 colleges are bound by an MOU. They also publish this journal by the same name annually.

The word 'Cenacle' has its origin in Latin as *cenaculum* from *cena*. Latin *cenaculum* was used in the Vulgate for the "upper room" where the Last Supper was eaten. The earliest Cenacle was formed in 1824, as a literary coterie. This name was adopted by the group in a positive sense as the main objective is to promote academics. Since its inception, Cenacle has undertaken many activities. An overview is being given.

In Sept 2010, a National Conference on "Mediation: Literature and Films" had been organized under this banner at Rajwada Palace, Nagpur. About 215 delegates participated from all over Maharashtra, MP, Delhi, Chattisgarh and Rajasthan. Mr Sachin Kherdekar, renowned Marathi and Hindi film actor and director had been invited to give the keynote. Noted litterateur Dr Jasbir Jain, writer and critic from University of Rajasthan, had been invited as the Guest of honour. A panel discussion had been organized comprising of panelists from various facets of literature and cinema. A souvenir was also released during this Conference.

In Oct 2010, a Symposium had been organized to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore

at RKKM auditorium. Dr Amrit Sen from Vishwabharti Shantineketan, had been invited as the main speaker. He spoke on Travel literature and Tagore. The symposium was well attended by students and teachers in large numbers. A cultural programme highlighting the cultural contribution of Gurudev was also presented by students and teachers.

In Dec 2010 Cenacle had organized a one day Teachers Training Workshop on "Evaluation Techniques and Skills", at RKKM. Dr Martin Wedell from London University conducted the workshop. Nearly 57 teachers participated in it.

In Jan 2012, Cenacle had jointly organized an International Conference with ELTAI and VMIT at Sharadchandra Arts and Comm College Butibori. It was a two day conference, with many participants from Sri Lanka, UK and Nepal. A Conference volume had also been published.

Research and related activities have been formally and informally promoted by Cenacle. The annual journal provides a space for well researched, peer reviewed papers. In Feb 2010, a lecture was organized at Santaji Mahavidyalaya on E-Journals for teachers and students. Dr Mangala Hirwade, of Library Science Dept of RTM Nagpur University was the chief speaker.

A lecture series on "Poetry and Soft Skills" had been organized in March 2015 at Santaji Mahavidyalaya. It aimed promoting the importance of soft skills and poetry in teaching of English. The invited speakers were Dr Binod Mishra from IIT Patna and Dr C.L Khatri from T.P.S. College Patna.

An 8 day workshop on Research Methodology and Research techniques was also organized in March 2015 at Santaji Mahavidyalaya for teachers and research scholars. This eight day workshop was conducted as per UGC norms, with due permission of the RTM Nagpur University. It was totally a self funded activity in which study material and certificates was also given to 58 participants. Participants from all over Maharashtra attended the workshop.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

In January 2017 under the banner of Cenacle, the 61st All India English Teachers' Conference had being organized in collaboration with AESI (The Association for English Studies in India) and Hislop College at Chitnavis Centre Nagpur. The topic of the conference is "Emerging Trends in English Language and Literature". 516 Delegates from all over the country attended the conference. It provided a vibrant platform for academic discourse. This three day conference had many well known academicians from all over India as speakers in various sessions. More than 200 papers were presented in parallel sessions in 3 days.

On 25<sup>th</sup> April 2018, under the banner of Cenacle, one day national seminar on "Indian Perspective of Infringement of Intellectual Property Rights" had been organized at Siddarth auditorium at PWS College.162 delegates from different parts of the country attended the seminar.

The MOU which the binds the 3 English departments, of Dr Madhukarroa P W S Arts & Commerce College, Rajkumar Kewalramni Kanya Mahavidyalaya and Santaji Mahavidyalaya faculty exchange and knowledge sharing regularly takes all the year round. Large number of students have also benefitted.

## **About the Journal**

Cenacle is a peer reviewed annual journal of English, which is being published since 2011. It was started with an aim to provide a platform for teachers and research students who want to publish their research papers, book reviews and poems.

The first issue was a general issue with 20 papers on varied topics. The second issue published in 2012, had as its focus area: "Gender Issues and Female Consciousness in 21st century Women Writers." This issue had 17 papers, 5 book reviews and 8 poems. The third issue published in 2013 focused on "Diaspora and Diasporic writings". The whole concept of Diaspora writing, dislocation and multiculturalism was evaluated in the well researched 15 papers. It also had 2 book reviews and 5 poems. The 2014 issue focused on "Revisiting Partition through literature and films." This issue had 13

papers, 3 book reviews and 10 poems. The 2015 issue of Cenacle had its focus area as "Borders, Border Theories and Border Crossings." This issue had 12 papers, 2 book reviews and 14 poems.

The  $6^{\text{th}}$  issue had its focus area as "Literature of War and Conflict.". Many good reviews were received, on many of the papers. It contained 13 papers on various related issues. There were 4 book reviews and six poems. Ms Gurushree Ramesh had contributed interesting write up on Time travel.

The editors have continuously tried to improve the quality of the journal. The focus areas provide a scope for researchers to find material for further research. Each issue has tried to include a theme paper, which has bigger scope and provides a deeper insight into the focus area. There is also a link between the issues which have been taken up.

The 7<sup>th</sup> issue was an open ended one. There were 12 research papers on different facets of language and literature, 3 selected poems and a book review. Lord of Flies was topic for the section Time Travel.

The 8<sup>th</sup> issue was special because since now the Journal is recognized by the UGC and also has a web presence. Previous copies are also available on its website cenacle.in. The 8<sup>th</sup> issue focused on the modern trends in literature. In its 18 research papers various trends in different genres were traced. Topics like, 'Impact of Translation on Literature', Displacement and Identity Crisis to Women's Literature very interesting and original papers were published. Poems, book reviews were also published.

The 9<sup>th</sup> issue focuses on "Short Stories today". This volume also has a good spread of issues related to the genre of short stories and also a small collection of short stories written by our contributors. The first paper by Dr Kanal provides an overview of how the genre developed. It's provide a detailed analysis, which can be used by researchers. Besides there are 12 other papers which dwell upon different aspects of short stories written by renowned writers like Clarrisa Estes, Bulbul Sharma, Paule Marshall Anita nair R.K.Narayan, Temsula Ao, Bharti Mukherjee, Anita Desai, George Saunders and Mulk Raj Anand. There are two well written

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

papers on Flash fiction and the changing face of short stories. The issue also had the regular spread of poetry, book reviews and two short stories. The issue received a good response and feedback from our readers.

The 10<sup>th</sup> issue of Cenacle is a landmark, which reflects the persistence and zeal of our contributors and readers. The focus area in this issue was "literature of protest". The theme paper by Dr Prantik Banerjee received great appreciation. Multiple facets of the focus area were discussed through the 26 papers which were published. From Dalit literature, to short stories of Chugtai and Mahashweta Devi, feminists protests from different seminal fiction writers to protest by playwrights was elaborately discussed through diverse papers. We are proud of the fact that this issue had a large variety of writing and received appreciations from different quarters. The positive feedback we have received helps us move ahead.

This is the 11<sup>th</sup> issue, which has as its focus area as Pandemic and literature. The theme paper has been written by Sucharita Sarkar, which traces various and pandemics and literary narratives in a very precise manner. Again there is good variety, as many genres have found representation. We hope our readers will enjoy this issue as we have in compiling it. Please send us your feedback, which is extremely valuable.

We are also sincerely obliged to our peer reviewers, editorial team and the select group which works tirelessly for the publication of the issue. Our consulting editors have also stood by us and guided us in many different ways. We would also like to thank Tripad Mishra for the cover design and Astha printers for the publication of the journal.

## CONTENTS—

	Page N	lo.
1.	From Fear to Understanding: Literatures of the Pandemic <b>Sucharita Sarkar</b>	1
2.	Ecologies of Fear, Geographies of Disease, and Topographies of Pollution in Pandemic Narratives <b>Prantik Banerjee</b>	15
3.	Storytelling in the Pandemic Era <b>Lima Sunny</b>	24
4.	Cinema: A Powerful Medium for Human Resilience during Pandemics <b>Nikita Agrawal</b>	31
5.	The Pandemic and the Play: Indian Theatre's Survival Strategies in the 'New Normal'. <b>Supantha Bhattacharyya</b>	40
6.	The Politics of Pandemic and the Fear of Social Apocalypse <b>Rupali Jain, Nutan Agarwal</b>	48
7.	Exploring Existential Issues in Albert Camus' <i>The Plague</i> <b>Vinod R. Shende</b>	59
8.	An Analysis of the Striking Similarities between the Spanish Flu COVID-19 <b>Priti Singh</b>	68
9.	Siddhartha Gigoo's <i>Love in the Time of Quarantine</i> : A Reflection on Fear and Uncertainty during Pandemic <b>Archana A Gupta</b>	76
10.	The Repercussions of a Pandemic in Anne Porter's <i>Pale Horse</i> , <i>Pale Rider</i> <b>Priya D. Wanjari, Akshara Rohankar</b>	85
11.	Exploring the grim picture of a pandemic in Daniel Defoe's <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> <b>G. R. Hashmi</b>	96

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

12.	The Impact of Pandemic as Depicted in the Movie 'Contagion'  Vandana V. Bhagdikar, Reema Kharabe	105
13.	CORONASUTRA: Bringing Alive the Life in Lockdown <b>Poorva Bhonde</b>	115
14.	Surviving Catastrophe in Jose Saramago's Blindness and Emily Mandel's Station Eleven <b>Priya Wanjari</b>	126
15.	A Life Misspent - A Recollection on Influenza Epidemics of 1918-19 <b>Urmila Dabir</b>	137
во	OKREVIEWS	
16.	Keywords for India – Apprehending the Elusive! <b>Supantha Bhattacharyya</b>	144
17.	Ghosh! for better or verse! Supantha Bhattacharyya	147
POI	E <b>M</b>	
18.	Corona Crisis <b>Ranjana Sharan Sinha</b>	151
19.	Pandemic to Poetry <b>Ranjana Sharan Sinha</b>	153
20.	My Mother's Many Admirers <b>Supantha Bhattacharyya</b>	155
21.	The Emperor's Newest Garments Supantha Bhattacharyya	156
22.	Life in the Times of Pandemic  Mrs. Priti Singh	157
23	Youth And I Priti Singh	159

## From Fear to Understanding: Literatures of the Pandemic

#### **Sucharita Sarkar**

"The vast cities of America, the fertile plains of Hindostan, the crowded abodes of the Chinese, are menaced with utter ruin."

Embedded as we are in the globally shared experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, does the line quoted above seem familiar? Is it perhaps an accurate reflection of the global devastation caused by the novel coronavirus in 2020? No, actually, the line quoted above is from Mary Shelley's dystopian, futuristic, science fiction, *The Last Man*, written in 1826, almost two centuries before the Covid-19 pandemic swept the globe and disrupted our existences in yet-to-be-understood ways, although there are eerie similarities of locations and impact. Interestingly, though, Shelley's novel is set further ahead than our present time: the novel is about a plague outbreak in the year 2092. Thus, reading Shelley's novel as we live through the Covid-19 pandemic connects us to the past, present and future. This suggests a commonality of human response to existential threats like the pandemic.

According to Slavoj Zizek, there are five stages of epidemics, and "one can discern the same five stages whenever a society is confronted with some traumatic break" (Zizek 49). Writing an early, urgent response to the coronavirus pandemic, Zizek identifies these five stages:

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

"First, there was a denial (nothing serious is going on, some irresponsible individuals are just spreading panic); then, anger (usually in a racist or anti-state form: the Chinese are guilty, our state is not efficient...); next comes bargaining (OK, there are some victims, but it's less serious than SARS...); if this doesn't work, depression arises (let's not kid ourselves, we are all doomed)...but how will the final stage of acceptance look?" (Zizek 51)

Considering Zizek's analysis, we may locate ourselves in any of these five stages of experiencing the pandemic, and we may assume that pandemic literatures will explore and express any or all of these stages. Furthermore, considering the universality of Shelley's novel, we may also argue that human responses to pandemics—across time and space differences—will contain similarities that are documented and explored in literatures. This is one of the primary reasons why we turn to pandemic literatures in order to understand, to learn about, and, perhaps, to cope with our bewildering, incoherent experiences of this pandemic.

Graphic memoirist Anoushka Shyam writes in her short account of living through the Covid-19 pandemic, "I hope that when we put pen to paper, our words carry something of honesty. I wonder what this novel (2020 Unabridged) looks like" (Shyam 8). Her words suggest a kind of writing that is an immediate response to pandemic, she is creating her graphic narrative through her lived pandemic experience. There is also another kind of pandemic literature, written when the writer is at a greater temporal distance from the event, writing about an event that is in the past. Sometimes, the writer will imaginatively create the dimensions of a fictional pandemic, set in a dystopian future. Whereas immediate literatures of the pandemic—that we are witnessing being written right now-contain a sense of urgency and reflect our own affects triggered by the event, these works are necessarily incomplete, hurried, fragmentary, often chaotic, and may lack a sense of closure. On the other hand, remote literatures of the pandemic (remote here refers to works written much after any pandemic, as well as to works

written about imagined future pandemics) offer a calmer authorial perspective, possibly a deeper investigation into the causes and effects of the pandemic, as well as a more consciously crafted and complete narrative with a deliberately constructed closure that can only come through the passage of time. Both these types—immediate and remote literatures of the pandemic—offer readers a range and depth of coping and learning resources that make them both instantly and enduringly popular and fascinating. In the following sections, I will be discussing select examples of such pandemic narratives, and I would like to add a disclaimer here that this is by no means any attempt at compiling an exhaustive list of literatures of pandemics.

#### **Pandemics and Literary Narratives**

Novels are some of the richest accounts of pandemics, and these fictional accounts are necessarily written *after* pandemics (rather than *through* or *during* lived pandemic experiences). It is unsurprising that the extended lockdown around the world, which forced people to stay at home with much more time on their hands than they did pre-Covid-19, saw pandemic/epidemic novels surge to new levels of sales and popularity, as did pandemic-related films and animation games. As early as March, 2020, the media were reporting "sales boom in novels about fictional epidemics" (Flood). Even as writers situated at various geographical and social locations are documenting their and our responses to the pandemic, readers around the world are turning to existing literature on prior epidemics, seeking what they need from the vast literary resources available to them.

Disease has, of course, always been one of the greatest threats human beings have encountered, and the magnitude of this threat multiplies exponentially when the victim is not just one or few individuals, but the mass of humanity. The theme of disease in literature can be traced back to at least the Medieval ages: in the European canon, Giovani Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (c.1348-1353) is set against the backdrop of the Black Death, or the bubonic

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

plague that devastated Europe in the fourteenth century. In the introductory frame-story, Boccaccio describes the physical, social and psychological sufferings of the plague with startlingly accurate detail, writing of the visible symptoms as well as the horrifying effects of the disease. His documentation of the swollen glands, blackening skin, and plague boils of the victims, and of the rotting corpses littering the streets have been commended for their stark realism by physicians and epidemiologists.

From the perspective of this chapter, which is aimed to study the interconnections between pandemics and literatures, what is perhaps more interesting is the function of the stories that Boccaccio places within the frame story. The *brigata* of seven young gentlewomen and three young gentlemen who seek refuge in a rural villa have not abandoned their social and familial responsibilities during the plague, they have come because their family members are either dead or have fled. Each member of the group narrates a story every day, and a hundred stories are narrated over the next ten days, with the proceedings closing with a song and dance. In a life challenged by disorder and the looming threat of death, these stories, songs and dances offer a space for refuge and recreation, and it is undeniable how important mental rejuvenation is for those of us struggling to cope with a pandemic. The ritualistic pattern of the storytelling-ten stories by ten different people every day—reinscribes a sense of order and predictability, necessary to ground us when we are feeling unmoored. The location of the storytellers, in a hillside rural villa away from the city, reminds us that isolation is a practice that was common even in the Middle Ages. By focusing on the necessity of storytelling, by choosing communal isolation as crucible where the storytellers come together, by foregrounding on the rituality and regularity of the storytelling process, and by placing this ritualistic and healing storytelling at the centre of his work—the margins of which consist of the pestilential horrors of the plague—Boccaccio is emphasizing the potential of stories to restabilize and recuperate us when we are struggling to survive the onslaught of disease and death.

The stories told within the Decameron are not directly related to the plague. Although they reference many well-known contemporary persons, these stories are love stories, tragedies, political commentaries and humorous jokes. However, the stories that we are turning to now, while living through the Covid-19 pandemic, are very distinctly stories about pandemics and contagious diseases. One of these books, which has recently seen a remarkable upsurge in popularity, is Albert Camus' The Plaque. Written in 1947, it is set in the plague-affected French-Algerian town of Oran, during a time which "rules out any future, cancels journey, silences the exchanges of views." Although the spread of the Internet has vitally made exchanges of views still possible for us in 2020, yet Camus' bleak setting of the past is still eerily reminiscent of our own situation. The character of Dr. Bernard Rieux, who opts to stay back in Oran to treat the sick, voluntarily accepting a life of "exile and imprisonment," reminds us of the frontline medical workers battling the novel coronavirus. Even as Camus describes the physical impact of the pestilence, his novel rises above mere documentation through its psychological analysis and its symbolic transferences. He begins the novel by writing that, "Everybody knows....pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our head from a blue sky": indicating both the suddenness of a pandemic and of our initial denial of its reach and impact. In *The* Plague, sickness becomes a metaphor for the absurdity of all life and for our ultimate helplessness; and the process of self-isolation leads not only to anxiety but to an awareness of the value of human contact and human communication.

The ending offers both a sense of jubilation as normalcy is restored and "cries of joy" can be heard "rising from the town," and also a cautionary warning that "such joy is always imperilled." The protagonist knows about the persistence of disease, and he reminds us:

"that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city."

Novels, thus, enable us to see the larger picture, the entire arc: that after pandemic will come recovery, but after recovery there will, inevitably, be another pandemic. Along with these wider perspectives, novels also enrich our understanding of pandemics through their deeper analyses of the crisis. Camus's novel suggests how our denial of the seriousness of any pandemic is politically manipulated by the state to suit its own interests. Daniel Defoe's novel on the 1664 Great Plague of London—A Journal of the Plague Year—exposes the culpability of the state in spreading misinformation about the pandemic. Such incisive analyses of the socio-political nuances of pandemics help us to unpack the pandemic politics of our own times. Even as we simultaneously critique and depend on the state machinery during unstable and frightening mass experiences such as the Covid-19 pandemic, even as we seek scapegoats for what may be seem to be either malignant conspiracies or inadvertent human lapses, finding our doubts and fears and criticisms reflected in literature is both validating and comforting.

Interestingly, outside the western canon, there are several other instances of novels written in the backdrop of pandemics and politics. One such novel is *Pootli, A Story of Life in Bombay,* written in 1915 by Ardeshir FJ Chinoy and (Mrs) Dinbai AF Chinoy, which contains vivid descriptions of the decade-long plague epidemic which raged in Bombay from 1896:

"During the first outbreak of the plague in Bombay in 1896, Bandora, which was then little known, soon became a place of refuge for the panic-stricken inhabitants of Bombay, which presented a spectacle more or less similar to that of London in the dark days of the Black Plague. The panic was so severe that whole

streets were deserted, schools had to be closed, and college-lectures delivered before more or less empty benches" (qtd. in Ranganathan).

Despite the obvious differences—it is evident that this century-old novel is set in the pre-Internet times—there are enough similarities—deserted streets, closed schools—for us to identify and empathise with. The disruptions of our daily routines and the excess time that many of us have—a side-effect of pandemic-related lockdowns—have afforded us opportunities to seek out and immerse ourselves in such relevant but oft-forgotten literatures.

#### Pandemics and Audio-visual Narratives

Just as Camus' *The Plaque* was one of the bestselling books of 2020, Steven Soderbergh's film Contagion (2011) was one of the most watched films of 2020. This is only to be expected, as there are marked and strong parallels between the film and our current situation: Contagion is about a global virus outbreak that kills millions of people. The characters in *Contagion* respond to the sudden onset of the epidemic in a range of ways; and these responses find resonances in our own reactions, even as we identify with the story and the characters of the film. There is one character, Mitch Emhoff (Matt Damon), who locks up his daughter in the house for months to protect her: so uncannily resembling our quasicarceral lockdown experiences. There are multiple characters working for health organisations who are at the frontline of the battle against the virus and who eventually develop a vaccine to save the world: again, a story arc that predicts our own, with heroic characters who prefigure our 'white angels,' the medical personnel who are battling the coronavirus. There is the character (Jude Law) who blogs about fake cures and earns profits at the expense of the lives of others: again, an echo of the burgeoning hoax cures and fake news that prey on our gullibility and vulnerability. Yet, even as Contagion maps our helplessness, it also maps our resilience. The arc of the story does not end with nothingness, it ends with hope. Although several characters die in the course of the film, several

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

survive, and it is the survivors who allow us to feel optimism, even as we watched the film at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic situation became increasingly bleaker by the day.

There are several other dystopian and post-apocalyptic films which have become popular with pandemic audiences in 2020, and some of these have miasmic virus-outbreak plots (like Outbreak or The Killer that Stalked New York), while some belong to the zombie survivor sub-genre (like 28 Days Later, Train to Busan, World War Z), among others, all of them connected by an overarching theme of humanity becoming helpless at the onslaught of a horrifying, unknown pathogen but demonstrating heroic resilience and agency to survive and defeat the threat. One significant Indian inclusion in the list of pandemic films would be the 2019 Malayalam film, Virus. Crafted in a medical-thriller format, Virus explores the 2018 Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala through the uplifting lens of the efforts of the local community to mobilize resources that would stop its spread and enable the residents to survive. Although Virus is based on a real-life event, most filmic narratives of pandemics are imagined re-creations of future pandemics and of human responses to these. Even those that are based on historically documented events (for instance, the 2016 Nigerian thriller 93 Days which was made about the 2014 Ebola outbreak), there is usually a time lag between the event and the film because making a film requires time, resources and planning that may not be accessible during a pandemic experience.

However, in contrast to the remote filmic narratives of pandemics, there is one media which provides a platform for more immediate audio-visual narratives of the pandemic: streaming services like Netflix. There is a rising demand for web-series or web-documentaries based on the pandemic, as enforced home-bound audiences around the world have more time to watch their screens, and as they continue to seek comprehension and consolation about their pandemic experiences. The Netflix docuseries, *Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak*, was released in January 2020, when

the Covid-19 pandemic was still in its early stages globally. It presciently projected the theory that a fast-spreading virus outbreak was due and, therefore, inevitable and unavoidable; but it was also not pessimistic. It provided the audience with detailed and useful information, equipping them to understand and act in ways that would strengthen them against the virus. It valorised the contributions of doctors, scientists and disaster experts, again providing a source of trust for the audience to depend upon. Most significantly, perhaps, it warned the audience about the panic created by misinformation, and enabled them to learn important lessons from the narration and from the pandemic itself.

## Pandemics and Graphic Narratives

Apart from fictional and non-fictional print texts, films and web-series, another emerging and vibrant domain of literature that is contributing significantly to our documented understanding of the pandemic is the graphic narrative (or, more specifically, the subdomain of graphic medicine). Whereas the most-read novels and the most-watched films during the Covid-19 pandemic have mostly been about past or imaginary epidemics, graphic narratives—like some of the web-series discussed here—are one genre that engage with the pandemic in real time. If I have classified most of the novels written and films made about the pandemic as remote pandemic literatures, most graphic narratives discussed here can be classified as immediate literatures of the pandemic. I will briefly look at the current engagements of graphic narratives with the health and human crisis unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The *Graphic Medicine* website is intended as a resource for health professionals, as well as non-professionals, and it aims at "reflecting or changing cultural perceptions of medicine, relating the subjective patient/carer/provider experience, enabling discussion of difficult subjects, and helping other sufferers or carers" (https://www.graphicmedicine.org/ why-graphicmedicine/). Throughout the pandemic disruption, they have been organising the *Drawing Together* initiative by the Graphic

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Medicine International Cooperative, which is part of a global, collaborative and urgent process of sense-making of the Covid-19 experience that has entangled humans across social, geographical and disciplinary boundaries. This initiative arranges virtual meets on a weekly or monthly basis, where participants are given a topic which they draw and share, with the help of a facilitator. One purpose is to "combat the social isolation of pandemic-related lockdowns, and to support and promote community" (https://www.graphicmedicine.org/graphic-medicine-newsdrawing-together-update/). For instance, on 1 May 2020, participants at "Drawing Together 4—Making an Un-mask"—drew a grid of eight rectangles on a page, and in each rectangle they drew a face expressing some emotion. After that, they selected one of these faces, and enlarged it to make a full-size mask, which had an expressive face on it (as well as a face with hidden expressions behind it) (https://www.graphicmedicine.org/drawing-together-4-un-masking-with-a-mask/). During a time when the ubiquitous mask has become a symbol of defamiliarizing the familiar, the unmask challenges this defamiliarization and resets the familiar dimensions of the human face in a consolatory gesture. Although it is a momentary gesture (as these paper masks are unwearable), such consolatory and participatory activities function as coping mechanisms during massive humanitarian crises like the pandemic.

In another initiative, the *Graphic Medicine* website is curating and archiving a growing list of Covid-19 comics, which relate to several areas of pandemic experience (education, ethics, humorous, historical) and perspectives (that of care providers, health professionals, and patients). One of the artists documented there is Indian-American Kay Sohini, who is posting comics about her experiences with Covid-19 in the United States and India via her Twitter feed, exposing and memorializing the banal and the tragic juxtaposed incongruously in our Covid experiences (https://www.graphicmedicine.org/covid-19-comics/). The Covid 19 comics are immediate instances of how graphic medicine artists

use the flexible and hybrid comic format to respond to the crisis and how they document and disseminate multiple experiences of the pandemic from diverse social and geographic locations. If we define literature as a space that explores how people process and document the human experience, then graphic medicine, at this point in time, is a vibrant and inclusive area of engaged humanities that is helping us to understand, deal with and record our current globally entangled human experiences in real time. Graphic medicine and graphic narratives are offering a range of possibilities and platforms to both professional (or expert) and amateur creators to express and engage with their own and observed experiences of the pandemic.

#### Conclusion

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the word 'panic' is embedded *within* the spelling of the word 'pandemic'. Pandemics unsettle our routine existences and expectations in abrupt, chaotic, often tragic, ways, and the disruption of our ordered routines leave us floundering and rudderless, unable sometimes to comprehend or cope. In her self-referential graphic memoir, *What (and how) to read and write without guilt during a pandemic*, Anoushka Shyam writes that, "We tend to turn to art in dark times, and the times sure are dark now" (Shyam 4-5). Literature, by virtue of its form and structure imposes an order and shape to this chaos, a light on this darkness, and an ending to this crisis. As a critic explains, each pandemic story is:

"some iteration of helplessness and agency, and the fiction of it means that the helplessness is contained in some way. Sometimes the containment comes by focusing on competent characters who save the world, and sometimes the thing that keeps the helplessness in check is the simple promise of being a story. It's the same terror, but it is set inside an enclosed narrative frame" (VanArendonk).

Literature in its multifarious forms—print, film, graphic,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

text, audio, visual—provides several resources that help us to cope with and to comprehend these dark times: a bedrock of past histories of pandemics that we can turn to for learning and for reassurance that this, too, shall pass; a consolatory and collaborative space to document and share our own lived experiences; an insight into the experiences of others which awaken our empathy; a site that records the multiple and complex truths of our shared trauma that future generations may learn valuable lessons from; an insight into the experiences of others which awaken our empathy; and a roadmap that reimposes a sense of order upon chaos, and a hope of healing upon trauma. Simply put, literatures of pandemics take us out of our individual experiences of fear, grief, despair and miscomprehension towards more affirmative and enabling connections with others and with the world: from isolated panic to collective understanding.

During dark times, as we have seen above, art and literature offer us understanding, comfort and hope. Although music is outside the domain of this chapter, which mostly focuses on narratives, there have been several musical compositions created in 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Again, I would classify these as immediate pandemic lyrics, and I will mention just one here, the song "Life Goes On" from the album BE by the Korean group BTS, where the song expresses a hope that echoes all of ours: "Like an echo in the forest...Like an arrow in the blue sky...On my pillow, on my table...Life goes on like this again. I remember, I remember." As a simple but earnest expression of our hopes that is in the process of remerging from our pandemic fears and doubts, and as an overt memorialization of an unforgettable trauma, perhaps it is apposite to conclude with these lines, even as we acknowledge pandemic literatures—past and present, remote and immediate—as a continually growing body of works that remember, reflect, and shape our darkest fears, strongest responses, and deepest hopes.

#### **Works Cited**

- Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Decameron*. Trans. G.H McWilliam. Penguin Classics, 2003.
- BTS. "Life Goes On." BE. Big Hit / Columbia, 2020.
- Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. Trans. Stuart Gilbert. 1947. Vintage, 1991.
- Contagion. Directed by Steven Soderbergh, Warner Brothers, 2011.
- Defoe, Daniel. *A Journal of the Plague Year*. 1722. Modern Library, 2001.
- Flood, Alison. "Publishers report sales boom in novels about fictional pandemics." *The Guardian*, 5 March 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/05/publishers-report-sales-boom-in-novels-about-fictional-epidemics-camus-the-plague-dean-koontz, Accessed 25 January 2021.
- Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak. Directed by Isabel Castro, Danni Mynard, Doug Shultz, Ryan McGarry, Arianna LaPenne, Netflix, 2020.
- Ranganathan, Murali. "How the first English novels by Parsis were written in the backdrop of the plague and politics." *Scroll.in*, 11 July 2020, https://scroll.in/article/967095/how-the-first-english-novels-by-parsis-were-written-in-the-backdrop-of-the-plague-and-politics, Accessed 5 January 2021.
- Shelley, Mary. The Last Man. 1826. Broadview Press, 1996.
- Shyam, Anoushka. What (and how) to read and write without guilt during a pandemic: A graphic narrative. Scroll.in, 22 May 2020, https://scroll.in/article/962590/what-and-how-to-read-and-write-without-guilt-during-a-pandemic-a-graphic-narrative. Accessed 3 January 2021.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

VanArendonk, Kathryn. "Why is Pandemic Fiction so Comforting Right Now?" Vulture.com, 6 March 2020, https://www.vulture.com/2020/03/contagion-coronavirus-pandemic-fiction.html, Accessed 3 January 2021.

Virus. Directed by Aashiq Abu, OPM Cinemas, 2019.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Pandemic: Covid-19 Shakes the World*. Polity, 2020.

**Sucharita Sarkar**Associate Professor,
D.T.S.S College of Commerce,
Mumbai.

# Ecologies of Fear, Geographies of Disease, and Topographies of Pollution in Pandemic Narratives

#### **Prantik Banerjee**

#### **Abstract**

The increasing virulence of infectious diseases in the last few decades (AIDS, SARS, MERS Ebola, swine flu, avian flu) and the current Covid-19 pandemic have made the presence of deadly pathogens a permanent marker of our life. At the same time it has also attracted a lot of interest from those who create new narratives in popular culture, especially film makers and writers of technothrillers, science fiction, and post-apocalyptic fiction. In this paper, I explore the modes and tropes of outbreak narratives in popular culture, i.e., narratives about the spread of killer diseases. I wish to show how such narratives not only map the transmission of global diseases across borders and nation states, but also reveal historical fault lines of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Besides, the affective power that circuits of culture have on audiences and readers produces ecologies of fear, geographies of disease, and topographies of moral pollution.

**Keywords** Pandemic narrative, tropes, hollywood films, bestsellers, medicalized nativism.

In this paper, I analyze how Hollywood films and bestselling fiction give expression to our cultural obsession with contagious diseases. They are also instrumental in affectively spreading our

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

fears and anxieties of a contagion. While infectious diseases have been around us since the very beginning, their dramatization in popular pandemic narratives seems to create an "ecology of fear". Hollywood films and pulp fiction seem to present both nature and animals as hostile hosts to human civilization. They project pathogens as predators sneaking around human bodies, waiting to unleash their devastating virulence. Monkeys, rats, bats, pigs, horses, flies – all seem to be "out there to get you" (a line from the film *Outbreak*). These films typify the cold Darwinian logic of natural selection and survival, wherein evolution codifies happenstance into strategy.

I wish to suggest that pandemic narratives offer a far more complex interpretation than what looks at first glance. I will attempt to show that the fear of contagion is displaced onto non-normative bodies and to an anthropomorphized virus. My first premise is that films and literary texts do amplify fear and anxiety of the contagion to a certain degree, but they also have a prophylactic effect on us. helping us to make sense of an epidemical crisis. What holds my interest in examining these circuits of popular culture is not simply the storyline or characters in pandemic narratives (I am reading film as a text, a multi-media text). I am also interested in identifying the underlying tropes that define "pandemic narratives" and their complex relationship with migrant microbes, travelling bodies, and border immunities. My second premise is that pandemic narratives show or describe outbreak sites not only as breeding grounds of transmitting pathogens but also as contact zones of racial and cultural politics.

## "Pandemic narrative"

A "pandemic narrative" is a narrative in fiction and film that repeats particular characters, images, and story lines, to produce a formulaic narrative. Pandemic narratives make use of certain rhetorical strategies and formal devices over and over again. The repeated use of certain tropes in a large number of novels and films has turned them into a set of conventions. Over the last few decades

the conventions of pandemic narrative have been used prolifically in popular culture, so much so that they provide an easily recognizable template of narration.

Open Twitter and you'll see people talking about films like *Contagion, Outbreak* and *The Andromeda Strain*. On Netflix, the documentary series *Pandemic* is trending. Reading and watching popular pandemic narratives influences our social and cultural lives. They enter into our conversations, influence our thoughts, and change our life patterns. Just following the narratives about the spread of highly infectious diseases is likely to lead us to either being fearful that things could get worse or being comforted that this too shall pass and we shall overcome. What is crucial here to understand is that pandemic narratives don't simply dramatize a contagion. They plot imaginative contagion terrains and chart the travelling routes of deadly viruses; they also play out complex subtexts of migration, displacement, racism, and exploitation.

Indeed, our popular culture is suffused with a number of bestselling novels and box office hit films that deal with deadly contagions. A few examples of pandemic narratives from popular fiction include Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*, Stephen King's *The Stand*, Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*, Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*, Jose Saramago's *Blindness*, and Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders*. Examples of pandemic narratives from popular Hollywood films are *Contagion*, *The Crazies*, *Outbreak*, *Twelve Monkeys*, 28 *Weeks Later*.

A pandemic narrative repeats a basic plot archetype: it follows a standard storyline about a growing virus posing a threat to a community, then describes the ensuing panic response and social chaos, and ultimately ends with the triumph of medical experts and health authorities over the bug. In other words, a pandemic narrative is one that maps a trajectory from social pandemonium to social equilibrium.

Now that we have a working definition of the pandemic narrative and its examples, I will show the manner in which

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Hollywood films and best-selling novels reconfigure our fundamental ideas about contagion, migration, and borders. This I will do by critically reading pandemic narratives and examining their repeated use of a set of tropes.

#### Myth and pandemic narratives

According to Priscilla Wald, the outbreak narrative is a mythic narrative in the sense that it presents the story as an epic battle, a battle of human protagonists against cunning and deadly viruses. In many popular novels and Hollywood films, the protagonist, is often a medical professional or a research scientist. He/she is shown to use intelligence, pluck and resourcefulness to detect, expose and outwit a sly pathogen with a self-mutating ability. But here is the catch. Mythic battles also need formidable antagonists, heroes need enemies. And often the enemies in pandemic films and novels are not simply the chimerical pathogens, but certain individuals or groups of people. They are migrants and travelers who are treated as outsiders — as the archetypal stranger—and are racially stereotyped.

Let me give you the example of Contagion, the 2011 technothriller made by Steven Soderbergh, and perhaps the most watched lockdown film. The film presents a mythic narrative. One of the female lead characters in the film is Kate Winslett, a US epidemic intelligence officer, who investigates a global outbreak but loses her own life in the battle with the virus. The film celebrates her and a few other characters as heroic warriors (like Covid warriors) who fight to contain the contagion and save humanity. One of the ironies in the film, perhaps completely unintentional, is to show how the unchecked border crossing of a white woman epidemiologist who keeps travelling between Washington, Minneapolis, and Hong Kong, becomes a threat to global health. The film's visual arc conflates the spread of contagion with the unchecked movement of people that technologies of travel and communication facilitate. The narrative of pandemic, thereby, throws up the internal contradictions of globalization.

What is interesting about the film is that it projects the heroic action using the common trope of binaries in an epic battle – heroic, travelling human versus maleficent, migrating microbe. The microbe is attributed with a consciousness, a diabolical intent – it is anthropomorphised – "If you want to shake hands with one of these viruses", says a character, "you had better wear a space suit". The mythic element, therefore, is dramatized as an epic battle between the human forces of science, medicine and technology, and anthropomorphized nature in the form of the microbe. But the crux of the matter is this – the 'humanity' and its survival that the protagonist fights for is a 'humanity' of the West. As I will show, this is one of the many ways in which pandemic narratives are infected with racial bias and prejudice.

Pandemic heroic narratives are also problematic in the manner in which they plot the contagion terrain with the help of formulaic tropes. One oft repeated trope is that of containment of the spread of the disease as picturized in Hollywood films. The problem with pandemic films is that its heroic narrative of battle and survival makes us ask the question — "who is expendable and who is not". In its opening scene, the movie Outbreak shows American troops aerially blowing up a mercenary camp in Zaire, shown as a banana republic in Central Africa (whereas the place being the seat of American sponsored terrorism is conveniently elided). The American military believes that the place is experiencing an outbreak of a viral disease whose source of infection is monkeys. Amidst the impressive playing out of the scene - hovering helicopters, medical experts in PPE, and US army men in battle fatigues - the camp in Zaire is bombed to bits in a few minutes. This is done apparently to contain the disease, never mind, that the body count is made up mostly of African guerrillas. In the film there is another scene which shows the same suspected virus resurfacing twenty years later in a small town in Southern California. People (read whites) begin to die in large numbers. This time the military refuse to destroy the place because as a top gun says, "These are Americans". Clearly, in the heroic narrative of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

pandemics not all bodies matter. Racial typologies of bodies make some people expendable, others not.

#### Stories have consequences

What is important to realize is that pandemic narratives and their use of medical and scientific terminology have consequences. In their dissemination of facts mingled with fiction, the narratives plot imaginative terrains, travelling routes, and border immunities for the contagion. But the fictional plots, as I have said, deeply influence the ways in which we think and respond as social beings in real life. Films and fiction are influential transmitters in our circuit of culture and affect our belief and value systems. Therefore, the story, language and information used in pandemic narratives powerfully control and direct our reception.

This is especially true in the case of *Contagion*. As compared to other Hollywood films on the same subject, *Contagion* was heavily invested in the science of epidemics for background research of its plot. The film's production unit consulted medical experts at every stage of the making of the film. Interestingly, after the Covid outbreak, the cast including Matt Damon and Kate Winslet, and the original screenwriter Scott Burns, collaborated with medical experts to release a series of PSAs (Public Service Announcement) to raise public awareness. The film convincingly depicts the trajectory of the virus and its vectors, acquiring a scientific aura in the process. In fact, the movie critics in their writeups on the movie during the pandemic gave a statutory warning to its viewers last April, saying, "If you're panicked right now, give the movie a pass". After all, the film showed 26 million people killed by the virus.

*Contagion* plays a crucial role in maneuvering what audiences make of pandemics in two ways:

First, in the process of visually categorizing threatening situations, the film also categorizes threatening characters, threatening social types.

Second, the film perhaps leads audiences with its scientific realism to believe that despite it being a cinematic representation, its deep research makes it a narrative of 'facts'. By doing so, the film problematizes the issue of 'truth claims' in the public sphere.

When President Trump called the Covid-19 virus a 'Chinese virus', we saw how his comment played out in international politics. Because of the anti-Asian prejudice inflected in his comments, a community was put on notice — "You are the 'other' and you endanger us all by your presence." It is unquestionable that the ethnic profiling of a disease not only marginalizes some people epidemiologically but also racially and culturally.

# Medicalized nativism, geography of disease, and topography of moral pollution.

The history of human migration is coterminous with the history of microbial migration. The history of epidemics shows that immigrants/migrants have not only been mythified as the 'archetypal stranger', but also scapegoated as the pernicious outsider, the pestilent other. The historian Alan Kraut coined the term "medicalized nativism" to describe how societies in Europe and America at different times stigmatized immigrant groups (like the Chinese, Italians, Irish, Haitians) by connecting them with communicable diseases. Kraut's medical nativism involves more than superimposing a disease threat on an unfortunate group. The disease marks the social practices of the suspect marginalized group as 'dangerous', thereby, projecting its intrinsic cultural difference as a potential threat to the majority host community. For example, we saw how guickly the Covid-19 narrative was turned into a pandemic narrative of the 'other' by the United States by calling it the "yellow peril". Media coverage, especially in America, played up in an endless loop, visuals of the alleged "primitive practices" on the Gangzhou farms and the squalid conditions in Wuhan wet markets. The visual grammar of the media, we know, is a powerful channel for shaping public perception and can create pathologies of fear.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Moreover, pandemic narratives often present the place of origin of migrating microbes as "geography of disease" and "topography of moral pollution". Take for instance the popular Michael Crichton's 1969 classic virus-as killer-thriller, *The Andromeda strain*, which was made into a top grosser film in 1971. The outbreak in *The Andromeda Strain* is caused no less by deadly extraterrestrial micro-organisms. However, in *The Andromeda Evolution*, written by Daniel Wilson fifty years later, the outbreak is shown to originate from the jungles of Africa. The upshot is that in both the original and the sequel the strain in the popular imagination became a signifier for Africa, or crucially for what Africa symbolized — a place that breeds evil, disease, and contamination.

This is an example of how the trope of migrant microbes and travelling bodies used by pandemic narratives symbolically attaches to certain places "geography of disease" and "topography of pollution". Contemporary popular fiction and films are suffused with such tropes which continue to perpetuate the legacy of imperialist and racist narratives. They are like the discourse of colonial medicine and tropical diseases produced by Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both narratives are often inscribed with an inherent racist bias, ascribing to non-European places a pollution that is physical as well as moral. Indeed, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* continues to darken many a pandemic narrative in modern times.

From the above analysis one may conclude that films and fiction are rich textual sites that help us to interrogate the politics of contagions, carriers, and nation states. By reading pandemic narratives from popular culture, I have tried to uncover their deep but invisible investment in cultural capital and ideological formations. My focus has been to pinpoint the many ways in which issues of race, neo-colonialism, globalization, and transnational migration are inscribed in the pandemic narratives of Hollywood films and bestsellers. Notwithstanding their agenda, popular films

and fiction on pandemics do play a crucial cultural role. They engage, amplify, and make us rethink about the migration of microbes, the migration of bodies, and border immunities.

#### Works Cited

- Crichton M. The Andrómeda Strain. New York: Knopf, 1969
- Nirenberg, David. Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages, Princeton NJ, Princeton UP, 1998
- Preston, Richard. *The Hot Zone*. New York, NY: Random House, 1994
- Snowden, Frank M. *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2019.
- Wald Priscilla. Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative. Duke University Press, 2008
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Panic: Covid-19 Shakes the World*. New York, Polity, 2020

**Dr. Prantik Banerjee**Associate Professor
Hislop College, Nagpur.

# Storytelling in the Pandemic Era

#### **Lima Sunny**

#### **Abstract**

The paper analyses the different roles story telling takes and aids in a classroom and beyond. It is based on the works of Susan Perrow and Clarissa Estes. It explains the framework of a story and how it can be used to promote various learnings in a guilt free environment. The readers are free to adapt their own practical versions based on the examples given here.

 $\textbf{Keywords} \, \textbf{Metaphor, journey, resolution, framework, tales.}$ 

#### Introduction

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of education. Even before education attained a formal classroom structure, stories had been used as a narrative tool for instruction and advice. Cultures have always narrated tales as a way of passing down beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations. Stories catch our attention faster and information transacted in story form retains a stronger grip on human minds. When students listen to a story, they create mind pictures, make inferences and predictions and fill in the gaps. Oral delivery of information when packaged as a story promotes greater involvement of the learner than a written text. Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Jungian psychoanalyst, poet and keeper of old stories (cantadora), holds the view that women's flagging vitality can be restored by extensive "psychic-archaeological" digs into the ruins of the female underworld (2).

When it comes to English Language Teaching, especially to ESL learners, stories have been found to be an effective tool to transact vocabulary and narrative styles. Learners identify with stories and are keen to pick up words and incidents faster. They also volunteer with stories from their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds which might resonate the same theme of the story being narrated in class. Story telling as a method of instruction and assessment supports educational objectives which include improving verbal skills, gaining self confidence, discovering the meaning of events, encouraging higher levels of cognitive thinking, and improving imaginative skills. A story is not rigid in itself and can be adapted to suit learner needs. During the time of the pandemic, online teaching becomes monotonous and tiring after a while. Students complain of fatigue and boredom. It is found that the inclusion of small stories is effective in bringing life into the classroom virtual or otherwise.

#### Framework of Stories

Perrow uses metaphor, journey and resolution as a threepart framework to construct stories (63). Metaphors help build the imaginative connection for the listener. They are like story seeds. A metaphor distances the problem and neutralises it so that the learner can freely contemplate on possible solutions without feeling compromised. Susan Perrow narrates the incident of how her eldest son overcame his nervousness at a dental surgery. Kieren, who was five years old, climbed up into the great chair, opened his mouth wide with anticipation and was examined. The dentist, an old Indian man, then told Kieren that one of his teeth was in need of a silver star to make it strong. He explained that it would hurt a little as he put the star inside, but the star would live there for a long time and take care of his weak tooth. The dentist asked whether it was ok to which Kieren nodded an enthusiastic ves and the procedure began. This is an interesting lesson in the power of metaphor, in this case, a 'silver star' in making a positive difference to Kieren's acceptance of having a filling put into his tooth (67).

Journey is the structural part of therapeutic story

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

construction. It is the part where the tension or conflict is built. Journey can be as simple as using repetition of the same experience in altered narration. It can be a single extending image or a combination of several images as per the age and grasp level of the learner. The well known tale of The Enormous Turnip is an excellent example. A little boy tries to pull up the turnip, then calls mother, who calls grandfather, who calls rabbit; rabbit calls mouse; and finally mouse calls caterpillar. There are countless versions of this story from cultures around the world. Without the build-up of characters, the story would simply be a recounting of a quite insignificant incident-'A boy went into the garden and pulled up a turnip' (67).

Resolution in a therapeutic story is the restoration of harmony or balance in a situation or behaviour that has been disruptive or out of balance (69). It is important that the resolution is positive and forward looking and not guilt inducing. In the Cranky crab story, the pinching behaviour is out of balance and unacceptable to the crab's friends. Through the help of the turtle, the seaweed mittens and the crab's own efforts, the behaviour is restored to balance. The little crab is not made to feel guilty about his behaviour. Instead the story journey leads naturally to a self determined resolution.

Creativity is a shape changer. One moment it takes this form, the next that. It is like a dazzling spirit who appears to us. This is the fluidity that we see in stories. Stories are adaptable at any stage to flow according to the need of the hour. In all tales there is material that can be understood as a mirror reflecting the illness or the well-being of one's culture or one's own inner life(Estes 134). Also in tales there are mythic themes that can be understood as describing stages of and instruction for maintaining balance in both inner and outer worlds.

A story should nurture more than give comfort. The difference between nurture and comfort can be explained. If we have a plant that is sick because it has been kept in a dark closet or enclosed space and if we say soothing words to it that is comfort. But if we take the plant out of the closet and put it in the sun, give it something to

drink and then talk to it that is nurture (323). A story is not just a story. In its most innate and proper sense, it is someone's life. In dealing with stories we are handling archetypal energy. Metaphorically we may call this as electricity. This electrical power can animate and enlighten but in the wrong place, wrong time, wrong teller it will not have a desired effect but a deleterious one (470).

Storytelling is universal and multi-cultural, involving a process of mutual give and take. They reveal personal power as well as personal identity. Remembering a story is more powerful and effective than merely recalling facts.

#### Storytelling as a pedagogical tool

Story delivers information in an organic form. All narrators of stories, whether a teacher, a professional storyteller or a performer, share a similar purpose: to inform, engage and entertain their audience. Both the student and teacher benefit from stories. Students learn from hearing stories because they pay closer attention, understand the message more readily, and retain key points longer. Teachers become better educators because being able to tell a story effectively enhances the perception of the teacher as a leader. A teacher who can adeptly tell a tale reveals an approachable, likeable and human side to his or her personality. This helps to close the distance between the teacher and the students by making the teacher's status less threatening (Pink 12).

The educational objectives supported by storytelling includes developing a love for language and stories, gaining a more in-depth understanding of narration, internalizing the traditional structure and convention of stories, improving writing skills and encouraging active participation in the creation of stories.

#### Adapting stories for classroom application

It is the teacher's prerogative to decide how to prepare notes for a class. Story can be used to pack the material to be transacted in the class. One can create a story to illustrate new concepts or ideas. Teacher can also take a familiar story and retell it with characters and situations based on curricular material. Historical events can

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

be narrated in story form. Hamilton and Weiss list ten reasons why storytelling should be used as a teaching tool (26).

Stories are the way we store information in the brain. A list of facts will be forgotten, but stories are remembered. Stories are the emotional glue that connects the audience to the message.

There is a difference between telling and reading. Without the book as a barrier, the teller looks directly into the eyes of the audience and is free to use gestures, facial expressions and body movements to enhance the telling and help the learners to understand the story better. The reader sees only the words on the page while the storyteller sees the wonder and excitement on the faces of the listeners. Listening to stories instils the love of language in learners and motivates them to read.

Stories transcend one's current environment. Good storytelling can transport learners out of their stuffy meeting rooms and offices into an adventurous world away from the workplace. In this altered reality, the mind becomes more open to perceiving and thinking in new ways. This is an ideal position for learning.

Stories are motivating. They are ideal for attitudinal training because when an audience is motivated, they no longer need to be persuaded. An encouraging story will inspire someone to take action.

People make time for stories. Even the busiest of people will stop to listen to someone's story or to tell one of their own. Stories are why people are drawn to movies, novels and gossip magazines.

Stories are more likely to be shared. They are like hooks that draw people in as they are passed from one person to the next. Facebook stories are a testimony.

Stories give meaning to data. Many people perceive data as meaningless numbers. This happens when the data is disconnected to anything important in their experience. But when the data is placed in the context of a story, it comes alive.

People want to know about origins. When we watch or read

about a superhero, we always remember the person's origins. We know where they came from and the circumstances that created their superpowers. Human beings are defined by their origins and people are curious about where heroes (real life or fictional) come from, how they change and evolve.

Stories make people care. When we know our audience, their pains frustrations and joys- our stories can reflect their emotions and experiences. As learners begin to see themselves in the story and begin to identify with it, they start to care (Hamilton & Weiss 26).

#### Story promotes Multiculturalism

Being sensitive to other cultures is something one need to consider when telling and writing stories. Folk and fairytales contain something of the unique quality of the culture from which they are drawn. By telling folktales from diverse cultures we help to strengthen our student's global rather than just national consciousness. Any classroom dedicated to promoting multiculturalism should have an abundance of folk tales available. Such stories are a healing balm for our modern times. Apart from enriching the students experience has shown that minority students, in particular, 'light up' when they hear a story drawn from their own culture. This acknowledgement of a learner's cultural background can be both reassuring and strengthening (Perrow 260).

When it comes to teaching English to non native speakers, stories function as interesting brain material because of the emotional connection that stories generate. As Melanie C. Green would say, "When I share a story with you I am letting you into my world. I am providing you with a visual map from your door to mine. It is like inviting you not only into my house but sharing a cup of tea with you" (403). The learner is bound to oblige if not reciprocate with a narrative of their own. Bilingual narration may also be used to make learners familiar with foreign words.

In the Indian context, stories have been used from time

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

immemorial to teach, instruct and rectify. The grandma stories, Panchatantra tales, Tenali Raman, Akbar Birbal and Vikram Betal series all stand testimony to the popularity and appeal of stories on Indian appetites. Thus story emerges as a very powerful instructional tool both in formal and informal modes of teaching. This powerful traditional method of using stories as a fluid text, could be very well adapted for ELT in the Indian context since India happens to be a vast treasury of colourful stories. It is high time that Indian ELT class rooms become colourful, imaginative and creative spaces of learning using stories as an important tool. The Indian proverb goes on to say, "Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever."

#### **Works Cited**

- Estes, C. P. Women who Run With the Wolves.U.K.:Rider. 1998. Print.
- Green, M.C. &Brock, T.C. "The Role of Transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.79, 401-421. Web. 10 Jan. 2016.
- Hamilton, M.&WeissM.Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom.New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers. 2005. Print.
- Perrow, S. Healing Stories for Challenging Behaviour. U.K.: Hawthorn Press. 2008. Print.
- Pink, D. "Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool". Http://www.teaching through the hearts. blogspot.in. Web. 7.Jan. 2016.

Lima Sunny Asst. Professor, Dept. of English St. Paul's College Kalamassery, Kochi.

## **Cinema: A Powerful Medium for Human Resilience during Pandemics**

## Nikita Agrawal

#### Abstract

Since the dawn of civilization human beings have been progressive both in actions and thoughts. Human Civilization has faced many problems in different forms such as earth quake, volcanic eruption, storm, communal riots, world war, epidemics and pandemics. All these problems are the cause of sufferings in the human world. Disease control has always been a challenge for human beings. Time to time it has shown its gigantic form and scientists have done their best efforts to control or check these epidemics yet it has engulfed many lives. Plague, Cholera, swine flu, Spanish Flu and Tuberculosis are some of the diseases which have caused much harm to human population. At the starting stage these diseases were incurable but later they became less effective and curable. Indian cinema as well as world cinema has two perspectives; entertainment and social reform. Cinema, like literature, is the mirror of society as it presents the circumstances more effectively and beautifully than literature. A number of movies have been made on disease control and epidemics. There are many Hollywood movies: Contagion, Outbreak, Monkey, Pandemic, Seventh Seal, Dawn of the Dead, Cabin Fever, Resident Evil, Carriers, Blindness, Black Death, World War Z, Rise of the Zombie and Bollywood movies: Dr. Kotnis ki Amar Kahani, Neecha Nagar, Phool aur Pathar, Khushboo, Aazaan, Go Goa Gone, The Dead 2: India, Mirutha, Dasavathnaaram, Ghost Stories which convey

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

powerful social messages during this difficult time of pandemic. These movies have played an important role in solving the problems and maintaining human resilience during the pandemic. In this paper I have focused on movies based on pandemics and their role to empower human beings to face such conditions.

Keywords Human resilience, cinema, pandemics, literature.

#### Introduction

'Severe adversity opens our eyes to a need that is higher than our own strength.'

It is well said about human beings because man is the unique creation of God and is thought to be the best among all the creations of God on the earth. From the origin of civilization and from the time when human beings started to live in groups (for which he is called a social animal by famous Greek philosopher Aristotle) human beings have always been progressive in actions and thoughts. Man's resilience starts from cradle and ends in grave. Man has struggled hard for his existence and this struggle is still going on.

Human life is full of problems. These problems appear in different forms: natural and manmade. Nature has always been a deciding factor for human progress; flood, earth quake, volcano, storm, epidemics and pandemics challenge his existence in the world. Man from the dawn of civilization has been facing these problems and has been successful in solving them. In future these problems will come but man has capacity to overcome them with his wit and intelligence.

Epidemics/pandemics like Covid 19 are a big challenge for the world. It is the first time that infectious disease like this has been spread in so wide area that there is nearly no country which is not affected by this Pandemic. It was started from China but it has made the whole world its target in no time. This is not the first time that human generation is facing fatal disease like it; human history is replete with such examples when epidemics and pandemics disturbed the whole world. Plague, Cholera, Chicken pox, Spanish flu, Swine flu, Bird Flu have affected the whole world fully but the scientists and health workers put their best efforts to remove these fatal diseases or made them less effective. Thank God we have got a vaccine against the deadly virus Covid 19 and hope that human life will achieve its natural charm once again.

In the period of isolation and frustration, people turned to literature and cinema to console their afflicted mind. The descriptions of pandemics in literature guide us to be prepared for what happens next.

#### **Pandemics in Literature**

Literature provides us clear and insightful records of the contemporary events; it is a reliable source to know various historical, political, social and economical conditions of a particular period. Human beings are struggling with pandemics since ages. Literature presents many moving records of pandemics which affected human civilization badly. It not only shows one of the greatest disasters of humanity but also depicts man's struggle and his will power to overcome such calamities. In this way literary books console us and strengthen us to encounter this disaster.

It is said that the word 'epidemios' was first used by Homer in *Odyssey*. The same word is used by various scholars and philosophers with different meanings: Hippocrates uses it as a medical term; Greek writers like Homer and Sophocles refer it in mythological sense as the punishment of sins. The description of pandemics occurred in the books of many renowned authors i.e. Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, Denial Defoe, Marry Shelley, and Albert Camus. Even in India Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sumitranandan Pantha and Jayant Mahapatra have told stories involving deadly infectious diseases.

Giovanni Boccaccio provides an authentic description of pestilence in Florence in 1348 in his famous book *Decameron* in which he offered one hundred preposterous and funny tales of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

human vulnerability and strength. The Black Death was a bubonic plague pandemic that started in 14<sup>th</sup> century and lasted sporadically till 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the history of human life, none of the pandemics has affected the world as badly as the Black Death. Chaucer who was the eye-witness of tremendous human loss during that time described about the outbreak and consequences of the plague in his *Canterbury Tales, Pardoner's Tale* and *The Book of the Duchess*.

Thomas Nashe, one of the University Wits, introduces the plague in his play *Summer Last will and Testament*. His famous comic picturesque prose fiction *The Unfortunate Traveller* contains the vivid descriptions of the 'hotspurred plague' that struck Rome in the summer of 1552. Thomas Moore in *Utopia* talks about an ideal society which is free from the evil effects of epidemics. Ben Jonson's comedy of humours *The Alchemist*, written in 1610, uses the background of a severe plague year to provide a light humour by satirising the human weaknesses and follies. Though it seems very odd that people think of jokes, laughter and fun during pandemic when they encounter deaths of their near and dear ones, literature appeared as the reliable way to come out of their depression.

Samuel Pepys, a famous diary writer of Restoration age, gives a realistic account of plague in his age. The first mention of the fear originated by plague in Pepys' Diary is found on April 30, 1660 as he wrote "it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all." (Heumann) He tells us how he was concerned with his frame of mind as he was trying to be in good spirit during epidemic. He wrote how he suppressed negative emotions on hearing the death of his friends and acquaintances: "doth put me into great apprehension of melancholy.......but I put off the thoughts of sadness as much as I can." (Heumann)

Daniel Defoe gives firsthand account of the great plague of London (1665) and Marseilles plague (1720-21) in *Journal of the Plague Years* and *Due Preparations of the Plague*. Mary Shelley in her apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* presents the deep understanding on the concept of immunity and the nature of

contagion. The novel discusses the development of the small pox vaccine and the nature of contagion in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Edgar Allen Poe, a well-known American poet and novelist, presents the plague as a mysterious person in his short story *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842). Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* is post-apocalyptic novel which is set in 2073 America. Albert Camus novel *The Plague* depicts the disastrous effects of pandemic in Algeria city of Oran.

In India, many eminent authors including Rabindranath Tagore, Munshi Premchandra, Suryakant Tripathi Nirala, Ahmad Ali and Jayant Mahapatra have presented many moving experiences of pandemics in their works. Tagore's long poem *Puratan Bhritya* describes the fatal effect of chicken pox that killed millions of people in 20<sup>th</sup> century. But now chicken pox is not so fatal disease as it used to be. In December 2019, WHO celebrated 40 years of eradication of small pox. Suryakant Tripathi Nirala in his Memoir *Kulli Bhatt*, Ahmad Ali in *Twilight in Delhi*, Jayant Mahapatra in *The Abandoned Cemetery at Balasore*, *India* gives account of various epidemics.

#### Pandemics in Hollywood movies

'Great theatre is about challenging how we think and encourage us to fantasize about a world we aspire to' is a famous quote of Willem Dafoe about cinema (qtd. in Theatre Critic). Like literature, cinema is also the mirror of society. It presents the situations in different forms but its final aim is like literature: to provide relief to afflicted souls. Though history of cinema is not as old as literature; it flourished in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century but very soon it has taken place as a new form of fine art. Cinema is the best medium of presenting situations in visual form with entertainment. It appeared as the best way of maintaining resilience in the time of suffering. Though it doesn't provide any medicine and clinical treatment but it removes tension, refreshes human mind and fills heart with positivity.

Since the time of its beginning, there is not any area which is not covered by cinema. Like literature, cinema also teaches the art of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

life in a more influential way. There are lots of movies on different subjects and they also have been presented in different ways.

Like other subjects epidemics and pandemics have always been recurring themes for film industries. Both Indian and foreign film industries have focused on this subject to grab the attention of spectators. These movies attract the attention of the world towards fatal contagious diseases and also make people of aware it. Many foreign movies i.e. Contagion (2011), Outbreak (1995), Monkey (1995), Pandemic (2008), Seventh Seal (1957), Cabin Fever (2002), Resident Evil (2002), Dawn of the Dead (2004), Carriers (2009), Blindness (2008), Black Death (2010), World War Z (2013), Rise of the Zombie (2012) have focused on epidemics as well as pandemics. Among these movies Contagion became very popular during this year because of its unnerving similarities with the onset of the current pandemic. The movie demonstrates the outbreak of a deadly virus that is transmitted by respiratory droplets. It takes a realistic view how the world would react to a pandemic and what is happening in the world at the moment eerily well. We get enough information about the disease and learn how to save ourselves from it.

Some of the movies took their source from the novels and other literary works: *Blindness* directed by Fernando Meirelles, was based on the novel of the same name written by Portuguese author Jose Saramago. It centres round an epidemic known as the 'white sickness' which blinds everyone. *The Andromeda Strain*, directed by Robert Wise, was based on Michael Crichton's seminal novel of the same name. *Outbreak* directed by Wolfgang Petersen, adapted from Richard Preston's non-fiction *The Hot Zone*. It focuses on the outbreak of a fictional Ebola virus and orthomyxoviridee like motaba virus. These movies play an important role for human resilience as they show that it is not the first time that people are in the clutch of a pandemic but human civilization has overcome many pandemics.

#### Pandemics in Indian Movies

When we think about Indian cinema, we are reminded of

the movies full of romance, songs, item songs, gorgeous costumes etc. Though Indian cinema is not known for its serious engagement with health issues, there are a number of movies which are dedicated to doctors, researchers and courageous saviours who play an important role during the outbreak of pandemics. These movies not only attract the attention of spectators towards the mysterious and fatal pandemics and virus that threaten to destroy humanity but also leave behind some important messages. It is also very shocking to note the arrival of the first moving pictures in Mumbai and the arrival of the deadly Bubonic Plague almost coincided. When the Lumiere Brothers were showing the first moving pictures in Watson Hotel of Mumbai in July 1896, the bubonic epidemic plague had started attacking the city.

Hollywood movies have dealt with the situation of pandemics and natural calamities directly; Indian cinema has used these subjects in the background of many movies. Film historian Pavan Jha makes an interesting observation: "Natural calamities have always been an interesting plot point of our cinema and literature, sometimes at the core and sometimes to set up the ambience and sometimes to drive the climax on a high....." (BKD) During the early stage of cinema in India, V. Shantaram told a very inspiring true story of an Indian doctor saving the lives of many resistance soldiers from an infectious disease in his memorable film Dr. Kotnis ki Amar Kahani (1946). The movie was based on Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's story And One did not Come Back which took its inspiration from the heroic life of Dr. Dwarkanath Kotnis. The movie presents the role of a doctor in serving humanity in the most difficult times when people were locked out in their homes. Even after 74 years of its release, it is still being watched on YouTube as an inspirational story by doctors and others. In 1946, Chetan Anand's celebrated movie Neecha Nagar, based on Maxim Gorky's play The Lower Depths, deals with the story of a disease outbreak in the context of great injustice against slum residents. This celebrated movie having a powerful social message won the prestigious grand prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Satyajit Ray's film Ganashatru, based on Henrik Ibsen's play An Enemy of the People,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

depicts the story of jaundice epidemic, superstition and corruption of local people.

There are many movies which convey powerful social messages amidst pandemics. Phool aur Pathar is a very memorable movie which is set in the back drop of the plague. It tells about a house that was abandoned by a family during plague. The movie *Khushboo* directed by Gulzar is adapted from Sarat Chandra Chatopadhya book Panditmashai which is also based on plague. Aazaan (2011) deals with the subject of human made virus and the biological war to destroy it. The movie Seventh Sense, directed by A.R. Murugodoss is based on a Chinese virus. The movie *Quyamat-City under Threat* also focuses on a biological war. It tells about an imminent threat which is caused by a deadly virus which can be used as a tool of biological war. The movies like Go Goa Gone (2013), The Dead 2: India (2013), Miruthan (2016), Dasavathaaram (2008), Ghost Stories, 7 Aum Arivu, Qayamat (2003), Krrish-3 (2013) and Virus 2019 focus on the effects of fatal diseases immensely so that people may be aware and they can learn much about the effects and results of contagious diseases. Besides these there are a number of movies which slightly describe the effect of pandemics on human generation.

#### Conclusion

The covid 19 pandemic has locked human activities and industries for a few months but it has provided fodder for many stories not only to authors but to film makers also. Many directors have made up their mind to produce movies based on the concept of lock down, the condition of people and society during lockdown and post lockdown. Sai Abhishek, a famous director said that "seemingly overnight, the virus has changed our daily lives and the way we interact within our very own communities. There is obviously very high level of interest from audiences across genres" (Abhishek).

Art often imitates life and it can be truly said in the reference of cinema which presents the grim realities of life weather it is natural calamities or manmade disasters. When people were inside their homes and trying to maintain social distancing to protect themselves, Cinema became a reliable source to make people aware of the pandemics and how to cope with it. The movies based on pandemics were the only way to connect people with the current situation and convey the dos and don'ts in this critical time. As cinema houses were shutdown, Netflix, Hot star and Amazon Prime videos came forward as a good platform to bring awareness among people.

These movies helped us understand pandemics when the entire world is sitting in the same boat and is fighting with a common but unseen enemy. All the movies either in India or in foreign countries always give solution at last and it is shown that there comes peace and harmony in the end. Finally human life wins all the difficulties. These corona clouds will go forever and clear sky will be visible again. We must remember that 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind.' The new dawn of hope will come sure.

#### **Works Cited**

- BKD Corona virus: "Films that talk about pandemic and viruses." *National Herald*, April 10, 2020. www.india.com
- Heumann, Ute Lotz. "Diary of Samuel Pepys shows how life under the bubonic plague mirrored today's pandemic." *The Conversation*. April 24, 2020 www.theconversation.com
- Jha, Lata. "Indian Movies have a new inspiration." *This time it's Covid 19*, August 20, 2020. www.livemint.com
- Ouzounian, Richard. "The Big Interview: Willem Dafoe." *Theatre Critic*. June 7, 2013, www.thestar.com

**Nikita Agrawal**Research Scholar
Bundelkhand University
Jhansi.

## The Pandemic and the Play: Indian Theatre's Survival Strategies in the 'New Normal'.

#### Supantha Bhattacharyya

#### **Abstract**

Individuals, families and communities have experienced trauma, fear, existential anxiety because of the new pandemic. Constructive, artistic responses have also emerged with visible impact and implications for all the sectors and the new normal. In the domain of theatre spatial relationships and interpersonal dynamics play an integral function. The physical distancing requirements and closure of the performative venues have acutely restricted not merely public performances but also rehearsals and other logistics. Ancillary services are a vital aspect of theatre, they too have been affected. Theatre today is attempting an assortment of survival techniques including incorporating the new norms into the performance, digitization, intimate theatre, black box theatre. There is reason for optimism, that with better awareness and universal vaccination, theatre would be able to overcome this threat to its existence as well.

**Keywords** Pandemic, theatre, innovations, sensibilities, strategies.

The pandemic has deeply and universally impacted the psyche and health of individuals and nation states. A large number of individuals, families and communities have experienced shock,

trauma, fear, existential anxiety and grief. This has been reflected in increasing number of visits to hospitals, tests undertaken, calls received by mental health services, reporting of domestic violence cases and similar issues. Prof. Manohar Pawar believes that whenever there is collective shock, mass illness and grieving, community anxiety and stress, individual-focused professional practice is seldom adequate. He insists that it is important to creatively contemplate mass responses to address such massive needs and issues. When people were impacted by wars, many poets wrote patriotic poems, and people sung and listened to them in their own languages that helped them cope with the stress and prepared well to respond to the attack and impact. Similarly, the pandemic has made a deep impact on the psyche of some who have written pandemic awareness-raising poems, and they have been sung by common people in common voices with popular rhythms. In addition to individual-based responses, it is critical to think about professional community and mass-based responses, when it is necessary and relevant. It is also important to systematically explore the role information and digital technology has played to raise awareness of the pandemic and hygiene, and continue businesses mostly as usual in some sectors. These are constructive responses to the coronavirus pandemic, and there is a lot to learn from them in terms of their impact and implications for all the sectors and the new normal (Pawar, Introduction).

The Coronavirus (also known as Covid-19) pandemic has also had a paradigm-shifting global impact across all arts sectors. This is all the more apparent in the domain of theatre where spatial relationships and interpersonal dynamics — between performers, between performers and viewers — play such an integral funtion. The physical distancing requirements and closure of the performative venues acutely restricted not merely public performances but also rehearsals and other logistics. The arts and culture sector is primarily an economic one, characterised by a very high proportion of self-employment. The pandemic has impacted the budgets of every group and practitioner and, with the world in the middle of a possible second

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

wave, the situation is unlikely to improve soon. Widespread closures resulted in massive revenue cuts for cultural organisations majorly dependent on ticket sales, in addition to devastating effects on organisational employment and on the very survival of independent artists and professionals. Ancillary services which are such a vital aspect of theatre, such as technicians – lightsmen, makeup artists, costume designers and the craftsmen who store and put up sets, have almost disappeared. Many have returned to their native villages and towns and moved on to other jobs. In a personl interview, iconic playwright, Prof. Mahesh Elkunchwar confessed to this researcher that he personally receives many reports of out-of-job theatre workers in centres like Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur etc, bereft of alternatives, have been reduced to diverse forms of menial labour and even begging. Many performing arts institutions, facing existential threats, are attempting provisional adaptations by opting for innovative digital services. This generally manifests itself in the free online streaming of previously recorded performances of many groups and companies.

Many theatre workers, critics and theorists, however, believe that not all is lost. Dipannita Nath reminds us that historically, whenever a major upheaval has shaken the foundations of society, it has prompted alternative voices to emerge. In small studios and people's homes, several major arts movements, such as Dadaism, were born in the wake of crises, such as World War I. In the 1960s and '70s, apartments became popular venues and black box theatres came up to push avant garde ideas into the open. Polish theatre master Jerzy Grotowski, for instance, did great work in using spaces in unusual ways (Nath). Worldwide, many interesting and inventive stratagems have been devised to counter this unprecedented threat to performance arts. Intimate venues, restricted entries, limited cast and pared-down scripts are the new normal as the pandemic redefines theatre. The Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theater in St Petersburg staged a brief version of Anton Checkov's Cherry Orchard, within the popular online game Minecraft in June. Ninety players were able to watch the performance from within the Minecraft version of the Bolshoi

Drama Theater. While others had to join the YouTube live stream. The Gorch Brothers, an up-and-coming troupe in Tokyo, stages contained performances on the back of trucks, that can be driven around the country Conquest Theatre, in Canmore, Canada put up two one-act plays in a forest — in founder Marjorie Sutton-Bridge's acreage — with the woods as the backdrop, with social distancing in place (*The Hindu*: 14 Aug, 2020).

Across India too, artistes are keeping theatre alive — by thinking small. Avantika Bhuyan observes that it is not merely the space and the medium but the dramatic narratives have also metamorphosed. Some troupes have reimagined their performances for digital platforms, others have experimented and retold stories, many have taken to writing new material to suit the times. Called "digital live performances", these are adapted for audiences at home, in front of a screen, who are most likely watching alone. The shows are streamed on platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, Twitch, Insider, Instagram and Facebook. And quite often, the pandemic, screens and technology are embedded into the story, new protagonists in the play. Production costs are not as high as a regular theatre performance— it is not necessary for venues to be booked for performance and rehearsals, it is possible to keep props at the minimum and what is particularly tempting: dispense with expensive and elaborate sets. Mohit Takalkar, the 42year-old director of Pune's Aasakta theatre company has debuted his first digital performance on 2 October 2020, writing the story and visualising it for a laptop screen rather than a stage. *The Colour* of Loss is an adaptation from Booker prize-winner Han Kang's The White Book, in which the author and her sister reminisce about all things white, from sugar cubes to breast milk. The play interrogates objects such as tubelights, whipped cream, toothpaste, radish and paper as atypical portals to memories and experiences. With the background shrouded in black, the haunting music and the inflections in the actors' voices are the underpinnings of this intense, personalised experimentation. The digital frame allows mostly for closeups, and hence the performance almost creates an

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

atmosphere of a deep, intimate conversation with the characters from the story.

Noted Mumbai theatre director and writer, Sunil Shanbag, for instance, has come up with a new form for the online space called TheatreNama, which allows the performer to discuss issues that the usual physical space might not. "How a production was created, the first 100 years of Mumbai's theatre, ideas of censorship, and more—these are some of the kinds of things we talk about and the response has been great," he says. Mumbai-based Akvarious Productions too, instead of merely creating digital plays on Zoom and Insider has also curated live performances on its Instagram channel, AkvariousLive. And a considerable body of new topical writing has emerged from it. While most of the content has been new, they have also done a reimagining of Shakespeare through Aseem Hattangady's Quaran-time Shakespeare, which hypothetised on what the bard would have to say about the pandemic. While the group hoped to entertain audiences through this global crisis, it did not want to ignore the issues that plague us. "Some of our most successful pieces spoke about religion, caste, class, mental health. We put a few of these pieces together into a performance called Covid or Without You that premiered at Prithvi Theatre on 10 December as part of our 20 years celebrations," says Akvarious team leader, Akarsh Khurana. However, as Quasar Thakore Padamsee of the Mumbai-based theatre group QTP, explained in an interview, "plays online" is a misnomer, as plays need a live audience. Instead, they should be considered as "reimaginations of the play into an online story-sharing experience" (Bhuyan). Theatre practitioners are now consciously thinking of demarcated content for digital and physical theatre. Santanu Bose, Dean, Academics, the National School of Drama in Delhi is of the opinion that theatre as a sponsored or corporate activity has been impeded and will reduce further. The entertainment sector always functions on the fringes of hardcore industries. The top of the economic pyramid is not stable at present, so patronage for the arts would significantly decline. Theatre and other creative arts now

have to survive, not as a major funded event or as big shows in auditoriums of hundreds or thousands of viewers but as niche, connoisseur-driven happenings (Nath). Prof. Bose himself has converted the basement of a building in Delhi's Chittaranjan Park into a makeshift theatre. Playwright, actor-director, Mahesh Dattani is upbeat about the possibilities of The Harkat Virtual Interactive Stage in Mumbai, which takes a simple black box theatre space, and rigs digital cameras on the ceiling enabling viewers to have a view of performers on the wall-screens and even interact with them at will without compromising on social distancing (Dattani).

The enfant terrible of contemporary philosophy, Slavoi Žižek, always vigilant about developments and trends, with impeccable timing, came up with two volumes on the pandemic. In the first part, he pronounces that in the midst of this novel epidemic, we are all bombarded precisely by calls not to touch others but to isolate ourselves, to maintain a proper corporeal distance. This indicates a different meaning for the injunction "touch me not" ("noli me tangere" – Jesus to Mary Magdalene, John 20:17). Hands cannot reach the other person; it is only from within that we can approach one another—and the window onto "within" is our eyes. These days, when you meet someone close to you (or even a stranger) and maintain a proper distance, a deep look into the other's eyes can disclose more than an intimate touch (Žižek, #8. Introduction). Having identified the source of the present psychological malaise, he then proceeds to offer the semblance of a remedy in the second part. The crucial trap to be avoided here, Žižek infers, is to conclude that, since we are facing a multidimensional global crisis, particular interventions are not enough—that a kind of radical ethical change, a new global ethics, is needed. Those in power like such calls for new ethics, as they seem to provide a simple way out of a crisis; they love to conceive of a crisis as a largely ethical problem. What is needed today is for us to develop a clear perception of all the dimensions of the crisis we are in, without privileging one aspect over the other (like those who claim that in our struggle against the pandemic we have the right to neglect the

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

ecological crisis), and for radical social change to follow from this: action should follow thinking (Žižek, #9. Appendix). Theatre workers have, from the beginning of the art form's history, understood the necessity of emotionally and intellectually connecting – touching, in Žižek's parlance – their co-actors as well as their audience for authentic artistic realization.

Art too came from humans and permeated only human sensibilities. Like a virus, it has the ability to mutate in times of adversity growing stronger with each re-birth. However, unlike a virus, art is life-affirming (Dattani). In the opinion of the economist, John Maynard Keynes, as guoted by Fareed Zakaria, a big problem with technological revolutions is that with so much of the work increasingly being done by technology, humans would have to find a sense of purpose. Zakaria reasons that for human beings, especially men, work has historically given them an identity, a sense of accomplishment, and dignity (Zakaria, Ch. 05). These are not irrelevant attributes, but those which all arts, including theatre, has always attempted to represent. In a post-pandemic scenario, there is ample reason for optimism, that with the assistance of better hygienic awareness and universal vaccination policies, theatre would be able to prevail over this threat to its existence as it has overcome many other challenges in the past. With renewed sense of purpose, a set of new skills and pioneering technologies theatre worldwide would rediscover its bona fide self and emerge healthier and stronger than before.

#### **Works Cited**

Bhuyan, Avantika. "How the covid-19 pandemic scripted Indian theatre's second act." https://lifestyle.livemint.com/news/big-story/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-scripted-indian-theatre-s-second-act-111608296902141.html December 19 2020. Accessed: 03-03-2021.

Deb Roy, Lachmi. "Stage is Struggling but We will Find Ways to Tell Stories."

- https://magazine.outlookindia.com/story/entertainment-newsstage-is-struggling-but-we-will-find-ways-to-tellstories/304113 December 23 2020. Accessed: 03-03-2021
- Dattani, Mahesh. "The World's a Digital Stage: A year after theatres shut down, artistes are reinventing themselves in the digital world to stay relevant". https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/watch/worldwide-theatre-shutdowns-have-pushed-theatre-artists-into-the-virtual-world/article34132057.ece March 22 2021. Accessed: 23-03-2021
- Gowri, S. "Theatre in a Covid-19 world: The Rise of New Formats."

  https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/theatre/thea

  tre-in-a-covid-19-world-the-rise-of-newformats/article32355569.ece August 14 2020. Accessed:
  03-03-2021.
- Nath, Dipannita. "Small is Big in Indian Theatre as It Reopens in the Pandemic." https://indianexpress.com/article/express-sunday-eye/small-is-big-in-indian-theatre-as-it-reopens-in-the-pandemic-7227133/ March 14 2021. Accessed: 15-03-2021.
- Pawar, Manohar (Ed.). *COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on and Implications for Community and Social Development*. SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2021.
- Zakaria, Fareed. *Ten Lessons from a Post-Pandemic World*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2020.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World*. OR Books, New York & London, 2020.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Pandemic 2 Chronicles of a Time Lost*. OR Books, New York & London, 2020.

**Dr. Supantha Bhattacharyya** Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Hislop College, Nagpur.

# The Politics of Pandemic and the Fear of Social Apocalypse

#### Rupali Jain Nutan Agarwal

#### **Abstract**

This paper contends that the investigation of the pandemic is as of now or going to be a significant piece of abstract examinations. The world has seen various diseases and pandemics in various occasions. The pandemics have made, presumably, a colossal effect on the social, social, and financial fields, getting a change human existence. Authors and writers of different countries and societies have reacted to the pandemics, planning the occasions that they have seen and remarking on their unsafe encounters. There are numerous original books composed on the difficult stretches of infections and pandemics in which in some cases even 50% of a country or a city crushed. The current world is massively influenced by COVID-19, which is a dangerous infection supposedly spreading from Wuhan, China. The infection is killing great many individuals consistently, contaminating millions and putting the entire world in danger. The authors and artists of the are likewise composing magnificent fiction and verse, reacting to the emergency and looking for methods of mending and enduring. Drawing on the incredible works created on the effects of the pandemic in various occasions of history, the paper investigates how people get by in the midst of such pandemics, look for approaches to mend themselves, and studying writing during the pandemic. The paper likewise momentarily spotlights and remarks on how the authors and artists

have been experiencing the Pandemic/Epidemic and recording their encounters in their work.

**Keywords** Dystopian literature, canonical western text, historical events, social apocalypse, dehumanization, re-assess human values.

Charles E. Rosenberg in his seminal essay, 'What is an epidemic: AIDS in Historical Perspective' has defined the cultural understanding of the term epidemic in these words:

We use the term epidemic in a variety of ways—most of them metaphorical, moving it further and further from its emotional roots in specific past events. Even in relation to health, we employ the word in contexts decreasingly related to its historical origins... A true epidemic is an event, not a trend. It elicits immediate and widespread response...an epidemic takes on the quality of pageant—mobilizing communities to act out proprietary rituals that incorporate and reaffirm fundamental social values and modes of understanding. (Rosenberg, 1-2)

It will be in this metaphoric vein, rather than the strictly historical perspective that this paper seeks to examine some examples of pandemic/epidemic literature, most prominently Mary Shelly's apocalyptic novel The Last Man. In the effect that the epidemic produces at the social and philosophical level, it can be equated with a pandemic as well. Both generate fear of life and extinction as well as engendering the insecurities produced by the fragility of the human biological and evolutionary condition. The metaphoric evocation of an epidemic too creates the pageant-like melodrama of social forces in which the characters are compelled to re-assess human values and individual will.

It would be tautology to say that the current predicament of the world has made us hark back to the ways in which literature before the 20th century has interpreted and recorded pandemics and epidemics. The fundamental impulse of the literature which deals with the pandemics, real or imaginary, has mostly been to

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

archive facts and real incidents; inspired perhaps by the most famous text detailing the events of a pandemic, Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year.

The earliest recorded pandemic which changed the face of human society and of the archival methods of pan-social events like pandemics would be the Black Death which ravaged the world in the fourteenth century. Texts like the Decameron, belong to this category. While not talking primarily about the plague, it relies on the actual historical event for its narrative background. The plague gives the Decameron the narrative justification for the ten characters to be in one place long enough to tell their different stories. In a lot of interesting ways, the Decameron sets the stage for future literary representations of the plague and similar medical catastrophes. Boccaccio details some descriptions of the plague in medical terms but his purpose, even in the descriptions is clearly to highlight the ways in which the plague dehumanized the society and its members rather than a mere archiving of the plague's geographic and medical characteristics and journeys.

On the other side of this spectrum lie fantastic tales of awe-inspiring and sublime horrors of almost supernatural intensity like Mary Shelley's The Last Man (1826). One way or another, the literature of pandemics and epidemics reveal the fissures which belie the society as well as the deficiencies and problems which are foundational and not merely on the surface. This is the reason why most pandemic literature is as much about the individual will surviving against the insurmountable curses and turns of nature/universe as they are about revealing how the social systems in which we live are basically biased and jaundiced with discriminations of many orders. At the same time, the literature of pandemics has the capability of universal vision, of looking at the society not as striations gathered through time but as a collective of individuals with common denominators and affective impulses.

Defoe's The Journal of a Plague Year is perhaps the best known record of an actual epidemic. The other pandemic which received much attention and was recorded in factual and fictional accounts was the 1918 influenza pandemic. Because of the print economy of the early twentieth century and the developed forces of market capitalism, the 1918 influenza has received much attention across genres. One can find similar treatments of subsequent pandemics like the AIDS pandemic, the SAARS, the Ebola, the Zika virus among others. Rosenberg's essay, quoted above, is an excellent example of this social and academic trend. While not all of these have been pandemics of the scale that the COVID-19 has become, these have still been crucial for generating discourse about the socio-political and economic paradigms for understanding and archiving the scale and multi-dimensional influences of health-risks like these but also the politics of access and representation/attention during these kind of wide-spread historical events.

One way in which the metaphor of the pandemic has been employed in literature has been as a tool for social criticism. When one begins to look at pandemic literature through this lens, a wide array of theoretical avenues appears. Critics like Freud, Nietzsche, Marx, Althusser, Gramsci and Foucault have focussed on the ways in which social structures distort the natural order of things. A number of treatises by these and subsequent theorists attempt to reveal fundamental structures which underlie complicated human inventions through ideology. This is the same impulse which runs through most of dystopian and pandemic literature. Albeit in these genres, this revelation comes through shocking and often hyperbolic disruptions of the 'naturalized' social order of things. Through this dislocation of the normative structures, the 'real' order of things and the real condition of human existence in the natural world is impressed upon the reader

This paper will however, focus not on the actual political, social, psychological or economic repercussions of pandemics and epidemics as health-risks and large-scale historical events but merely on these representations of pandemics and epidemics in

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

canonical western texts like Shelley's The Last Man. Such an exploration, while not new, can still help us articulate some ways in which we can assess the current world situation.

Literature and stories have always been considered as important vehicles for the analysis of the social tangles and complications that surround humans. It is a powerful vehicle for the categorization and theoretical resolution of problems and social events which seem beyond individual control in real life. Pandemic literature has also often been used as a literary vehicle for the exploration of the psychological landscape of the writer and through the person of the narrator/protagonist, of the psychology of the whole society.

Melissa Bailes talks about this in her essay titled 'The Psychologization of Geological Catastrophe in Mary Shelley's The Last Man'. The supernatural elements permeate the text of the novel as the narrator begins by referring to the Sybelline leaves on which the future of the humanity is inscribed and which detail how humans are heading towards extinction through a pandemic.

While Shelley's work is not rooted in any actual incident, it is still a very poignant reminder of the fragility of human life in the grand scheme of geological evolution and change. Taking her cue from the recent developments in geology, palaeontology and archaeology, Shelley pens a universal story about the stature of humans in the geological hierarchy of living beings. It is a warning about the fate of humans, mirroring the fate of so many other species, which have become extinct. The progress in the sciences of geology, palaeontology and archaeology lead as much to a strengthening in the new religion of science and rationality, as it led to the revelation of the insubstantiality of the human supremacy in geological time. It also highlights the central fear of almost all pandemic literature (even though this is not an official category of literature in itself), which is the centrality of the human existence to the world. Mary Shelley's The Last Man more than most other books in the genre, brings to the fore the scary prospect that the end of the

human race is not the end of the world. The book ends at the chilling note of ambiguity about 2100 being the last year of existence; whether this is the last year of existence of merely the human race or of the world and the ecology as we know it, is not clarified.

Shelley was not alone in these speculations. In fact, Bailes hints at the many contemporary works which dealt with similar themes – Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's Le Dernier Homme (1805), Lord Byron's 'Darkness' (1816), and Thomas Campbell's 'The Last man' (1823) (Bailes, 671). These images of apocalyptic destruction are in turn linked to works by George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, and Curvier. The reason why Shelley's text perhaps deserves more attention than any other text before it, is because this is the fictional representation of the social and scientific fear of the certainty of species extinction. Curvier had proved that the extinction of species was almost a certainty. Before this, the theological certainty was that God would not let the species which was created in his image to be destroyed so ruthlessly even if the species itself was at fault. This move from the God-centric medieval religions to the human-centric and rational scientism of the Enlightenment perhaps can be seen as the defining feature of the literature dealing with pandemics and epidemics which were written after Shelley. Man is not only at the centre of the literature here but also responsible for the unfolding of the historical events and forces.

Critics like Young-Ok An (among others) have also tended to see the novel through a prism of not just the abstract principle that the 'individual' is in philosophy but also in the 'individual' autobiographical sense. Young-Ok An states that:

...the "Sybelline" prophesy of the war-torn plague-ridden desolate earth prophesied in the text reflects Mary Shelley's emotional inscape as she mourned Percy's death, a loss which threatened her sense of human agency. The novel's formal hybridity also calls into question various thematic or conceptual boundaries and fixed identities, including those of self, gender, class, race, religion, and nationality. (An, 581)

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

In this sense of focusing on the individual, pandemic literature also has the narrative and thematic potential of the great tragedies as outlined by Aristotle. Since the narratives often bring the human-will-to-survive head to head against the great curses levied by nature or supernatural forces beyond his control, they provide the perfect canvass to portray the drama of human endurance against forces beyond his understanding. In a certain sense, the modern day pandemic and their reach and destruction are also perhaps the modern day equivalents of the primordial hubris. The psychological catastrophe of modern pandemics is brought about by the shock of the gullibility of man in the face of even the tiniest of the nature's villain but at the same time, it is also made worse by the social inequities which the modern civilizational models have incorporated as their hierarchical blueprints.

In this vein, it is possible to incorporate the melodramatic elements of death, loss, uncertainty, fear, terror, terrorism, hysteria and powerlessness to invoke the full intensity of catharsis intended by Aristotle for the great tragedies.

The unknowability of the cause for pandemic illnesses and the subsequent uncertainty about the cure and the lack of understanding of both of the above also induces a Gothic fear into texts like The Last Man. While there might not always be Gothic castles and the hidden doorways and passageways in modern pandemic literature, it still induces a fear because of the unknowability of the source of 'evil' and destruction in the text. This also highlights the natural-supernatural dialectic in the narratives. The politics then transcends the sphere of men and science, and enters the realm of abstract principles and morals.

What makes narratives like The Last Man interesting is that the Man-God/Nature debate becomes reconfigured in terms of scientific discoveries of the time. As Lauren Cameron describes in her essay, 'Mary Shelley's Malthusian Objections in The Last Man' one of the ways in which the apocalyptic visions of the text can be understood is through a study of the scientific debate between Mary

Shelly's father William Godwin and Thomas Robert Malthus, the leading political economist and demographer whose theories were often read in contradistinction with Godwin's work.

In this political vein, Cameron argues that it is possible to see strains of Malthus' theories in The Last Man because like Malthus, Shelley in the text seems to indicate that humans suffer under all civilizations and governments. The ubiquity of suffering seems to be inevitable. Much like the impulses of the work of Curvier, as discussed above, Malthus also believed that it is not possible to exclude man from those laws of nature that apply to other species and hence like the other species through geological history, humans are also doomed to extinction. This reduces some of the luster of scientific rationalism that the Enlightenment brought with it in celebration of the human potential for perfection.

In fact, the novel turns towards other repercussions of what eventually turned into the Anthropocene. The effect of the overpopulation of the world and the lack of resources, the overcrowding of cities like London which resulted directly from the industrial revolution, are all aspects which have been explored in this connection. In this sense, the subsequent pandemics as well as their representation in literature as well as the texts, like Shelley's, which imagine a fictional disease, all find both the cause, as well as the strength to fight the supernatural calamity, within the human heart and will.

The host of dystopian literature which has been written since the time of Shelley's novel also provide the antithesis to the otherwise glorious story of internationalism and scientism. Global travel for trade brought many new cultures, commodities but also illnesses within the intellectual framework of the eighteenth century European world and these narratives of seemingly strange and supra-natural diseases can perhaps be seen as embodiments of the fear of the unknown that these new discoveries brought with them. Alan Bewell, in his seminal text Romanticism and Colonial Disease has explored the multiple ways in which illnesses, whether

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

as serious as pandemics or otherwise, infected the colonial imagination and political landscape. Bewell makes this observation about the protagonist of Shelly's novel Lionel Verney.

Verney captures a critical moment in the history of epidemiology, which lies at the imaginative center of the novel: the recognition that modern diseases do not respect natural geographical boundaries. On an earth unified by the continual movement of people, goods, and pathogens, there are no safe places and nobody is exempt from possible contact...Yet the disease is also pandemic, and as such it illuminates imperial England's growing recognition that it was inescapably part of the world it helped bring into being, an anxious knowledge that was confirmed by the 1817 outbreak of cholera. By 1824, when Shelley began writing The Last Man, the disease had reached China, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Egypt. (Bewell, 296)

Bewell hence, locates the politics of the pandemic within the larger discourse of post-colonialism and its critique of racism. There are many scholars like Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb who have similarly analysed the politics of orientalization that the Novel Corona virus has already been subjected to, through its representation in popular western media as a 'mysterious' virus born in the wily by-lanes of South-east Asia and East Asia. Kolb also opens up the discursive need to examine the post-colonial contours of such historical events as the COVID pandemic and does so very interestingly through an oblique study of Shelley's novel The Last Man. She states:

Shelley's The Last Man imagines the end of civilization—which is to say the end of European civilization—at the hands of a plague that originates in a markedly "Mahometan" Istanbul. In the novel's proleptic vision, the Muslim world is so inconceivable in terms of legitimate sovereignty that Shelley prefers to imagine the end of the human race, the virus as final sovereign. It is worth remembering, at this particular moment, that the coronaviruses are so named because they appear in the shape of a

crown. This indelible vision shapes every aspect of contemporary Islamophobic discourse. (Kolb, 448)

Kolb ventures forth in directions that are beyond the scope of this present paper and yet create a space for democratic discussions about literary representations like Shelley's which can provide the key to unravelling some of the mysteries of social stratification in our own times as well. The politics of demarcation and 'otherness' that Kolb unravels in her paper are inimical to a study of our own post-colonial condition. It reveals, as this paper has been trying to do, the actual boundaries of geographic and discursive identities as well as the unsavoury dialectic antithesis of the western ideal of capitalist globalization—a 'global contagion'.

Even though two centuries have passed since Shelley penned her dystopian tale, its fundamental truths remain unchallenged. The spread of the COVID-19 virus has only justified such fears of inter-mixing that globalisation had affected in Europe at the time. While industrialism has reduced the size of the world to the palm of one's hand, it has also made the vulnerabilities of one group of people relevant as well as deadly to the rest of humanity. In a sense, the way that Mary Shelley is able to collapse the difference between the whole humanity and an individual, is appropriate for the current scenario as well and this is perhaps the best lesson we can draw from Pandemic literature. Humans cannot live in isolation, either socially or biologically, and the fight against common enemies like pandemics require the metaphoric as well as real coming together of the human race to prevail against the fates and the Gods.

#### **Work Cited**

An, Young-Ok. "Read Your Fall": The Signs of Plague in "The Last Man." Studies in Romanticism. Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter, 2005), pp. 581-604 (24 pages) Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

- Bailes, Malissa, 'The Psychologization of Geological Catastrophe In Mary Shelley's The Last Man ELH, Vol. 82, No. 2 (SUMMER 2015), pp. 671-699 (29 pages) Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press
- Bewell, Alan. Romanticism and Colonial Disease. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1999.
- Booker, Keith. M. Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide. Greenwood press. Connecticut. 1994.
- Cameron, Lauren 'Mary Shelley's Malthusian Objections in The Last Man' Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 67, No. 2 (September 2012), pp. 177-203 (27 pages), Published By: University of California Press
- Kolb, Anjuli Fatima Raza. 'Paravictorianism: Mary Shelley and Viral Sovereignty'. Victorian Studies, Spring 2020, Vol. 62, No. 3, Undisciplining Victorian Studies (Spring 2020), (pp. 446-459) Published by: Indiana University Press
- Rosenberg, Charles E. 'What is an epidemic: AIDS in Historical Perspective'. Daedalus. Vol. 118, No. 2, Living with AIDS (Spring, 1989), pp. 1-17 (17 pages) Published by: The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences
- Shelley, Mary. The Last Man. London: Henry Colburn. 1826.

#### Rupali Jain

Assistant Professor, Department of English Delhi University, Delhi.

#### Dr. Nutan Agarwal

Associate Professor & Head, Department of English Bundelkhand College, Jhansi.

# Exploring Existential Issues in Albert Camus' *The Plague*

#### Vinod R. Shende

#### Abstract

Pandemic can bring forth deeply rooted fears and modify human behavior greatly. The destruction that follows the pandemics like Plague and Covid-19 is both to be welcomed and despised. Indeed, the pandemic breaks the class barriers, but it also leads to the ruin of civilization. Presently, Covid-19 is also leaving the impact in the minds of everyone about their very existence and therefore it is a need of the hour to explore the pandemic literature from the existentialism point of view. Albert Camus' *The Plague* gives us the same kind of impressions that one encounters during the evil outbreak of Covid-19. This paper is an attempt to explore the existential aspects in the pandemic novel *The Plague*. Albert Camus, a French Algerian "Pied-Noir" colonizer, epitomized the sudden turn towards literary existentialism, developing his own unique sense of the term and he aptly sees the pandemic through the lenses of the same.

**Keywords** Existentialism, pandemic, absurdism, plague, quarantine

Existentialism refers to a wide range of philosophical beliefs and related cultural phenomena. Its origin can be traced to the latter half of the 19th century. Existentialism as a unified movement only gained serious grip, especially among literary circles, by the close of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

World Wars I and II, as writers contemplated the sheer man-made destruction and loss of life of these two wars. *The Plague* is a novel about a plague epidemic in the large Algerian city of Oran. In April, thousands of rats stagger into the open and die. When a mild hysteria grips the population, the newspapers begin clamoring for action. The authorities finally arrange for the daily collection and cremation of the rats. Soon thereafter, M. Michel, the concierge for the building where Dr. Rieux works, dies after falling ill with a strange fever. When a cluster of similar cases appears, Dr. Rieux's colleague, Castel, becomes certain that the illness is the bubonic plague. He and Dr. Rieux are forced to confront the indifference and denial of the authorities and other doctors in their attempts to urge quick, decisive action. Only after it becomes impossible to deny that a serious epidemic is ravaging Oran, do the authorities enact strict sanitation measures, placing the whole city under quarantine.

The public reacts to their sudden imprisonment with intense longing for absent loved ones. They indulge in selfish personal distress, convinced that their pain is unique in comparison to common suffering. Father Paneloux delivers a stern sermon, declaring that the plague is God's punishment for Oran's sins. Raymond Rambert endeavors to escape Oran to rejoin his wife in Paris, but the city's bureaucrats refuse to let him leave. He tries to escape by illegal means with the help of Cottard's criminal associates. Meanwhile, Rieux, Tarrou, and Grand doggedly battle the death and suffering wrought by the plague. Rambert finalizes his escape plan, but, after Tarrou tells him that Rieux is likewise separated from his wife, Rambert is ashamed to flee. He chooses to stay behind and help fight the epidemic. Cottard committed a crime (which he does not name) in the past, so he has lived in constant fear of arrest and punishment. He greets the plague epidemic with open arms because he no longer feels alone in his fearful suffering. He accumulates a great deal of wealth as a smuggler during the epidemic.

After the term of exile lasts several months, many of Oran's citizens lose their selfish obsession with personal suffering. They

come to recognize the plague as a collective disaster that is everyone's concern. They confront their social responsibility and join the anti-plague efforts. When M. Othon's small son suffers a prolonged, excruciating death from the plague, Dr. Rieux shouts at Paneloux that he was an innocent victim. Paneloux, deeply shaken by the boy's death, delivers a second sermon that modifies the first. He declares that the inexplicable deaths of innocents force the Christian to choose between believing everything and believing nothing about God. When he falls ill, he refuses to consult a doctor, leaving his fate entirely in the hands of divine Providence. He dies clutching his crucifix, but the symptoms of his illness do not match those of the plague. Dr. Rieux records him as a 'doubtful case.'

When the epidemic ends, Cottard cannot cope. He begins randomly firing his gun into the street until he is captured by the police. Grand, having recovered from a bout of plague, vows to make a fresh start in life. Tarrou dies just as the epidemic is waning, but he battles with all his strength for his life, just as he helped Rieux battle for the lives of others. Rambert's wife joins him in Oran after the city gates are finally opened, but Dr. Rieux's own wife dies of a prolonged illness before she and her husband can be reunited. The public quickly returns to its old routine, but Rieux knows that the battle against the plague is never over because the bacillus microbe can lie dormant for years. *The Plague* is his chronicle of the scene of human suffering that all too many people are willing to forget.

In *The Plague*, Camus uses a dehumanizing plague in Oran, Algeria to both accept several core existential and absurdist ideas while at the same time rejecting others in place of a belief in man's fundamental goodness, or potential to do good. Much of the force in *The Plague* comes from the callousness with which the narration views the plague itself as well as the lives of the men and women of Oran. Camus treats their mundane lives critically, remarking that "everyone is bored, and devotes himself to cultivating habits. Our citizens work hard, but solely with the object of getting rich. Their chief interest is in commerce, and their chief aim in life is, as they

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

call it, doing business," (Camus 4) reflecting a cynical disdain for the pettiness and ultimate insignificance of Oran's residents. Indeed, Camus goes so far as to erase the lines between each member of society, instead collectivizing them as a mass of existential inevitability: "No longer were there individual destinies; only a collective destiny, made of plague and emotions shared by all" (167). Raymond Rambert, a visiting journalist from Paris, further reinforces the core existentialist idea that man cannot be understood purely through the lens of science. Rambert warns that "you can't understand. You're using the language of reason, not of the heart; you live in a world of abstractions," (87) responding to Rieux's perceived understanding of the world solely through a medical and scientific viewpoint.

However, The Plague also rejects several key existential tenets by emphasizing the good, or potential good, in every human being. By the end of the novel, Camus repudiates the inevitability of the universe through Tarrou's lengthy response to Rieux "What's natural is the microbe. All the rest-heath, integrity, purity (if you like)-is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention" (253). Tarrou's "good man" is able to overcome existential inevitability and perhaps even come to matter in the cosmic scheme of things, a clear rejection of existentialism. As the novel moves past its climax, and the sheer destruction wrought by the plague is revealed, Camus maintains that "what we learn in time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise," (308) another rejection of existential indifference toward mankind. Albert Camus develops throughout *The Plaque* a profound admiration for people that are able to act charitable and moral toward others in the face of something as incomprehensible and violent as the plague.

Thus, although *The Plague* might be said to be an existential novel at a very cursory level, Albert Camus manages to incorporate the central idea that man is good (or at least potentially good) as the

novel progresses. In the face of the plague's destruction, many of the novels characters choose to remain and fight the affliction, even despite the odds. Though the underlying theme may be the disregard the universe and nature has for mankind, Camus has managed to weave the decidedly non-existential idea that perhaps man can do something to alter the course of nature, provided he is morally good.

As the novel opens, an air of eerie normality reigns. 'Oran is an ordinary town,' writes Camus, "nothing more than a French Prefecture on the coast of Algeria." (7) The inhabitants lead busy money-centered and denatured lives; they barely notice that they are alive. Then, with the pacing of a thriller, the horror begins. Dr Rieux comes across a dead rat. Then another and another. Soon the town is overrun with the mysterious deaths of thousands of rats, who stumble out of their hiding places in a daze, let out a drop of blood from their noses and expire.

The inhabitants accuse the authorities of not acting fast enough. The rats are removed – and the town heaves a sigh of relief but Dr Rieux suspects that this is not the end. He has read enough about the structure of plagues and transmissions from animals to humans to know that something is afoot. Soon an epidemic seizes Oran, the disease transmitting itself from citizen to citizen, spreading panic and horror in every street. In order to write the book, Camus immersed himself in the history of plagues. He read books on the Black Death that killed 50 million people in Europe in the 14th century; the Italian plague of 1629 that killed 280,000 people across the plains of Lombardy and the Veneto, the great plague of London of 1665 as well as plagues that ravaged cities on China's eastern seaboard during the 18th and 19th centuries. In March 1942, Camus told the writer André Malraux that he wanted to understand what plague meant for humanity: "Said like that it might sound strange,' he added, 'but this subject seems so natural to me." (Marafioti 69)

Proper recognition of this absurdity should not lead us to

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

despair pure and simple. It should — rightly understood — be the start of a redemptive tragic-comic perspective. Like the people of Oran before the plague, we assume that we have been granted immortality and with this naivety come behaviors that Camus abhorred: a hardness of heart, an obsession with status, a refusal of joy and gratitude, a tendency to moralize and judge. The people of Oran associate plague with something backward that belongs to another age. They are modern people with phones, trams, aeroplanes and newspapers. They are surely not going to die like the wretches of 17th century London or 18th century Canton.

It's impossible it should be the plague, everyone knows it has vanished from the West,' says one character. "Yes, everyone knew that, Camus adds sardonically, except the dead" (65). For Camus, when it comes to dying, there is no progress in history, there is no escape from our frailty; being alive always was and will always remain an emergency, as one might put it, truly an inescapable 'underlying condition'. Plague or no plague, there is always — as it were — the plague, if what we mean by this is a susceptibility to sudden death, an event that can render our lives instantaneously meaningless.

And yet still the citizens deny their fate. Even when a quarter of the city is dying, they keep imagining reasons why the problem won't happen to them. The book isn't attempting to panic us, because panic suggests a response to a dangerous but short term condition from which we can eventually find safety. But there can never be safety — and that is why for Camus we need to love our fellow damned humans and work without hope or despair for the amelioration of suffering. Life is a hospice, never a hospital.

At the height of the plague, when five hundred people a week are dying, one of Camus's particular enemies in the novel steps into a view, a Catholic priest called Paneloux. He gives a sermon to the city in the cathedral of the main square — and seeks to explain the plague as god's punishment for depravity. Camus's hero Dr Rieux loathes this approach. The plague is not a punishment for

anything deserved. That would be to imagine that the universe was moral or had some sort of design to it. But Dr Rieux watches a young innocent child die in his hospital and knows better: suffering is entirely randomly distributed, it makes no sense, it is no ethical force, it is simply absurd and that is the kindest thing one can say of it. The doctor works tirelessly against death, he tries to lessen the suffering of those around him. But he is no saint. In one of the most central lines of the book, Camus writes: 'This whole thing is not about heroism. It's about decency. It may seem a ridiculous idea, but the only way to fight the plague is with decency.' A character asks Rieux what decency is. Doctor Rieux's response is as clipped as it is eloquent: "In general, I can't say, but in my case I know that it consists in doing my job." (47)

Eventually, after more than a year, the plague ebbs away. The townspeople celebrate, it is apparently the end of suffering. Normality can return. But this is not how Camus sees it. Doctor Rieux may have helped to defeat this particular outbreak of the plague but he knows there will always be others: "Rieux knew that this chronicle could not be a story of definitive victory. It could only be the record of what had to be done and what, no doubt, would have to be done again, against this terror... As he listened to the cries of joy that rose above the town, Rieux recalled that this joy was always under threat. He knew that this happy crowd was unaware of something that one reads in books, which is that the plague bacillus never dies or vanishes entirely, that it remains dormant for dozens of years, that it waits patiently in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, handkerchiefs and old papers, and that the day will come when...the plague will once again rouse its rats and send them to die in some new well-contented city." (Felman 113)

Camus speaks to us in our own times not because he was a magical seer who could intimate what the best epidemiologists could not, but because he correctly sized up human nature and knew about a fundamental and absurd vulnerability in us that we cannot usually bear to remember. In the words of one of his characters,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Camus knew, as we do not, that 'everyone has inside it himself this plague, because no one in the world, no one, can ever be immune.' "Ah! If only it had been an earthquake! A good shake and that's it... One counts the dead, one counts the living and the whole thing's over and done with. But this rotten bastard of a disease! Even those who don't have it, carry it in their hearts." (Camus 79)

It is said that it takes millennia for order to be established; but only a week to usurp it. Days after the last rat had been cleared from the streets, the people began to die. *The Plague* is a story about a small town on the coast of Algiers that had never fathomed the idea of facing the plague; yet found themselves battling it. It follows the lives of the townspeople as they struggled to respond to an arbitrary killer in their midst. In detailing the varying responses of the people, Albert Camus attempts to draw a portrait of what it is to be human in trying times.

As the entire world is fighting with Covid-19, Camus' writing offers valuable insights into how one may approach the idea of disease. Thinking clearly about the arbitrary killer in our midst may enable us to act better against it. At the same time people have understood the absurdity of life. *The Plague* is replete with instances of people attempting to make sense of the calamity that has befallen them. They attempt to understand why the plague surfaced in their town, and in no other. They think of their pasts, their actions, their intentions to find cause for a disease that seeks to claim their lives without rhyme or reason. The narrative sings death and the people of Oran try to outlive it.

### **Works Cited**

Camus, Albert. The Plague. New York: Random House, 1991. Print.

Felman S. T; Albert Camus' *The Plague, Or A Monument to Witnessing*. Routledge 2013. Web.

Hongchen W.A.N.G. Between Absurdity and Rebellion Interpreting the Plague. J. Central SouthUniv.(Soc.Sci.)2006;

- (5):13.https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/202 0/mar/25/covid-19-is-natures-wake-up-call-to-complacent-civilisation (accessed on 11 Jan 2021)
- Marafioti M. Post-Decameron Plague Treatises and the Boccaccian Innovation of Narrative Prophylaxis. Annali d'Italianistica. 2005. Web.
- http://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/spring2012/1 Jacobs, Ethan 12, "Is *The Plague* an Existential Novel?" (accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021).
- http://G:/pandemic/Camus20and20The20Plague20The20Schoo l20of20Life20Articles20\_20Formally20The20Book20of2 0Life.html (accessed on 13 Feb. 2021).
- http://www.sparknotes.com/blog/every-book-on-your-english-syllabus-summed-up-in-marvel-quotes/ (accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2021).

Dr. Vinod R. Shende Assistant Professor Seth Kesarimal Porwal College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Kamptee.

# An Analysis of the Striking Similarities between the Spanish Flu COVID-19

# Priti Singh

### Abstract

Pandemics are calamitous and destructive as well as frightening. The Spanish flu of 1918 was the worst plague recorded in history and Laura Spinney British author of *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*thinks that the unforgettable war remains deep-rooted in the collective memory of the societycausing major loss of life in terms of single events. The first world war relegated the memory of the deadly influenza in the background. Within a century mankind is again faced with yet another pandemic in the form of COVID 19 which caught everyone unawares and the loss of life in the present century is again palpable. There are striking similarities between the two pandemics which I have tried to portray by analyzing the novella of Katherine Anne Porter, Pale Horse Pale Rider and enumerating how COVID 19 happened and what are its symptoms and the experiences of the people who have survived the catastrophe.

Keywords Pandemic, war, loss, life, destructive, calamities.

#### Introduction

What makes pandemics synonymous across geographic locations and time is not the presence of germs and viruses but that the human response follows the same pattern. In the ancient world, plague and pestilence were rather frequent calamities, and ordinary

people were likely to have witnessed or heard vivid and scary reports about their terrible ravages. When plague spread, no medicine could help, and no one could stop it from striking; the only way to escape was to avoid contact with infected persons and contaminated objects. The immense fright was also fueled by a belief in the supernatural origin of pandemics, which were often believed to be provoked by offenses against divinities. In the Bible (e.g., Exodus 9:14, Numbers 11:33, 1 Samuel 4:8, Psalms 89:23, Isaiah 9:13), the plague was viewed as one of God's punishments for sins, so the frightening description of its spread was interpreted as a warning to the Israelites to behave morally.

One hundred years ago, 1919 saw the end of one of the worst plagues in human history: the deadly 1918-1919 influenza pandemic. The pandemic was a true horror show, with 50-100 million people dying and millions more infected. The United States alone lost more people in the pandemic than it lost in all the 20th-and 21st-century wars, combined.

The objective of the present paper is to explore the similarities between COVID-19 and the Spanish Flu as portrayed by Katherine Anne porter in her autobiographical novel "Pale Horse Pale Rider", where she recounts her near fatal encounter with the Influenza, "It took me a long time to go out and live in the world again". she described not just her own traumaticrun-in with death, but also a rare literary account of the 1918 flu pandemic in the United Statesand the unprecedented human loss.

### Spanish Flu

The unforgettable war remains deep-rooted in the collective memory of the society. "In terms of single events causing major loss of life, it (Spanish Influenza) surpassed the First World War (17 million dead), the Second World War (60 million dead) and possibly both put together. It was the greatest tidal wave of death since the Black Death, perhaps in the whole of human history." (Spinney, p. 10). The unforgettable war remains deep-rooted in the collective memory of the society while people are unwilling to recall

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

a pandemic. Memories of war and plague work differently, while war is braced by entities like a victor, a time frame and a hero; pandemics offer "vanquished", confusing time frames, and no heroes. (Spinney, p. 257)

Porter recollects the pandemic solely by relying on fragments of memory before her illness and after her recovery. These fragments involved the landlady; her beloved fiancé Adam; and fatal flu in Denver, Colorado, during World War I, which killed many young men needed for battle. The novel begins with Miranda, the heroine, who dreams of a strange pale rider on horseback who is "Devil and Death", chasing her (Porter p.281) She wakes up from the nightmare, unaware of the fact that she has contracted the flu and hears the sound of a gong which welcomes her into the world of the nightmarish war. (Porter, 1965, p. 282)

While both the war and the flu equally poison the world at the time, but the war remains more popular among the characters. Adam Barclay, who was a soldier speaks very plainly of the flu calling it a "funny new disease" man at the barracks were dying of. (Porter, 1965, p. 293) In

Miranda's office, her colleagues briefly and airily discuss about the flu. (Porter, 1965, p. 296) Only when Miranda is infected do, we see them seriously discussing about the numerous funerals in theday, rushing ambulances at night, and lockdown of the city. (Porter, 1965, p. 312) Finally, though, Miranda acknowledges she is ill. Though her neighbour's response is initially only a simple exclamation of "Horrors," and a recommendation that she go to bed "at once!", her later description of Miranda's influenza as "a plague, a plague, my God" suggests the fear her illness provokes in those around her. As Miranda slowly succumbs, the reader learns of a broader crisis surrounding her, as Adam explains the seriousness of the epidemic unfolding beyond the walls of her room: "It's as bad as anything can be. ... all the theatres and nearly all the shops and restaurants are closed, and the streets have been full of funerals all day and ambulances all night." Being infected with something that

could be fatal made herconfess her feelings for Adam and value her own life more. But as she had a near-death experience during her long struggle with the flu, her outlook towards life changed and death seemed more blissful to her. The fashionable Miranda recovered with wasted body and a disorderly mind to a world which Adam was no more a part of. "There was no light, there might never be light again..." she contemplated over the worth of her life. (Porter, 1965, p. 326) She felt cheated as she would now have to take the very journey towards death a second time. (Porter, 1965, p. 327)

Spinney and Barry reported many different symptoms of the Spanish Flu that affected the survivors' physical body and mental condition. In the spring wave, a greater number recovered from the symptoms of ordinary flu and seldom people died unexpectedly. Whereas in August, 1918 deaths surged as situations worsened. (Spinney, 2017, p. 45) Leonide Massine, a great dancer and choreographer was shocked to learn that a great hulk looking policeman who stood in front of the theatre during his performance at London on September 5, 1918 had died of the flu by the nextday. (Spinney, 2017, p. 40) Nurses reported loss of teeth and hair, delirium, dizziness, insomnia, loss of hearing or smell, blurred vision, and suicide attempts. (Spinney, 2017, p. 47)Adam, who initially was a care giver to Miranda succumbed to the disease much sooner while Miranda defeated the flu after a long fight. (Porter, 1965, p. 292) The first symptoms that Miranda felt were weakness, headaches, loss of sense of smell, hearing, and sight. Later she wasunable to get up from the bed, slept for long hours partly conscious of things around her, had sweats and chills, vomiting, dizziness. (Porter, 1965, pp. 309-313) Delirium took over her and she "I tell you; they must come for her now or I'll puther on the sidewalk." "They can't get an ambulance, and there aren't any beds. And we can't find a doctor or nurse. They're all busy." "It's as bad as anything can be ... all the theatres and nearly all the shops and restaurants are closed, and the streets have been full of funerals all day and ambulances all night." "Two cherry flavoured pills," "orange juice and ice cream," "coffee in a thermos bottle." "The men

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

are dying like flies out there .... This funny new disease. Simply knocks you into a cocked hat." Porter wakes up from her illness to find that Adam, "tall and heavily muscled in the shoulders, narrow in the waist and flanks," handsome Adam with "his eyes pale tan with orange flecks in them, and his hair the colour of a haystack when you turn the weathered top back to the clear straw beneath," Adam, who had "never had a pain in his life that he [could] remember," had died. Porter, the consummate storyteller, used words to express the devastating effects of illness on her life. Porter weaves together the personal, the geopolitical, and the epidemiological with uncanny grace. The hell of pandemic, she seems to imply, like the hell of war, may be an inevitable fact of life. Life is what we make of the time we're given between such disasters. The final paragraph of Pale Horse, Pale Rider summons the feeling of coming out of a long fever to the shock of a wide-open life ahead, shadowed by loss:

No more war, no more plague, only the dazed silence that follows the ceasing of the heavy guns; noiseless houses with the shades drawn, empty streets, the dead cold light of tomorrow. Now there would be time for everything.

Pale Horse, Pale Rider survives as one of the few American literary accounts of the worst influenza pandemic in recorded history, a catastrophe that struck the world in the fall of 1918. When the pandemic ended, which took away even her "decrepit hound and silver kitten," there was, Porter wrote, a "dazed silence." The "Great Pandemic" claimed more lives in a short time than any other disease in history, yet because it was intertwined with the "Great War," the horror of it in human terms may not have been adequately chronicled. Some have called it the "forgotten pandemic"—butnot those who work in public health. Many strides have been made in flu prevention and control since 1918: better understanding of the virus, its distribution in nature, its presence in animals and birds, some of its virulence factors, how it mutates, how it is distributed in tissues, how it is transmitted. We now have prevention programs,

vaccines, and antiviral drugs. But manystill die, and the threat of another pandemic lurks.

# COVID 19

Today, considerable advancements have been made in the areas of health technology, disease surveillance, medical care, medicines and drugs, vaccines and pandemic planning. Flu vaccines are now produced and updated yearly, and yearly vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. Antiviral drugs now exist that treat flu illness, and in the event of virus exposure, can be used forprevention, as well. Importantly, many different antibiotics are now available that can be used to treat secondary bacterial infections. Despite all these advancements in medical science, the world witnessed yet another pandemic in the form of COVID-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 is the biggest global health crisis in a century. It has besieged the world and found us unprepared and highly vulnerable to its ferocious and ruthless virulence.

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was declared as pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11th, 2020 mainly due to the speed and scale of the transmission of the disease [1]. Before that, it started as an epidemic in mainland China with the focus being firstly reported in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province in February  $26^{\rm th}$ .

The origin and source of covid-19 remains unknown, although the initial cases have been associated with the Huanan South China Seafood Market where snakes, birds and other animals such as bats were sold. Considering that many of the early patients worked in or visited the market in contrast to the exported cases, it was suggested either a human-to-human transmission or a more widespread animal source. However, evidence of human-to-human transmission became strongly supported on January 22nd, 2020 after a visit conducted by a WHO delegation to the city of Wuhan.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Since the first outbreak recognized in February 2020, the disease spread rapidly around the world.

Symptoms and signs associated with viral pneumonia such as fever, cough, sore throat, headache, fatigue, myalgia and dyspnea are frequently shown by patients during the onset of COVID-19. Additionally, loss of taste or smell and gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting or diarrhea has also been reported by infected patients. Nevertheless, disease severity seems to be strongly associated with underlying host conditions including age, sex and overall health. The latter seems to play a critical role in susceptibility and contribute to the risk of infection. When severe and non-severe patients are compared, conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular and kidney diseases increase the risk of infection two to three-fold.

To arrest the spread of the pandemic people have been advised to wear masks, practice social distancing, wash hands with soap to maintain hygiene and not to touch anything with naked hands. Use of sanitizers has also been advised. Covid survivors relate their story of how after contracting the disease they have felt not only weak and bereft but also faced the stigma of loneliness and hostility by the society. For some who were experiencing Covid anxiety, or were simply curious to hear what the experience was like treated the survivors like heroes. One covid survivor says that "If you maintain good health, take your medicines and go to the doctor on time, all will be well even if you get infected. There is no need to panic," he says, adding that keeping one's mind healthy is essential. "Mentally, too, you should be fit and prepared, because you will be alone and isolated, amid unfamiliar people and surroundings. It will be a testing time, and it will require courage and a calm mind." Hence survivors of COVID-19 advise that one needs to have hope in traumatic times and above all to be optimistic and fearless even in times of crisis.

### **Works Cited**

Porter KA. Pale horse, pale rider: three short novels. New York: Harcourt,

Brace and Co.: 1939.

Potter, P. (2013). Pale horse, pale rider done taken my lover away." Emerging Infectious Diseases, 19(4), 694-695. https://doi.org/10.3201/eid1904.AC1904

https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/coverstory/story/20200622-the-covid-survivors-1688262-2020-06-13

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862342/

https://medhum.med.nyu.edu/magazine/?p=29223

http://rupkatha.com/V12/n5/rioc1s25n1.pdf

https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/1918-flu-pandemic-novel-coronavirus/

https://wchh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/psb.1843

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7332915/

**Dr. Priti Singh** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dr. Ambedkar College, Nagpur.

# Siddhartha Gigoo's Love in the Time of Quarantine: A Reflection on Fear and Uncertainty during Pandemic

### **Archana A Gupta**

#### **Abstract**

COVID19 pandemic and the lockdown has laid considerable impact on almost all the sections of the society. The predicament of the society has touched the sensibilities of writers. Gigoo in his short e-book *Love in the Time of Quarantine* which he completed in twenty-one days after the imposition of the nationwide lockdown has effectively figured out the problems; like the problem of food, shelter and safety from the virus infection; faced by the poor and homeless people due to sudden lockdown and social distancing norms imposed because of the pandemic and how the help and support was extended by the administration. Gigoo's *Love in the Time of Quarantine* is a literature written during pandemic which reflects upon the fear and uncertainty that prevailed in the lives of many due to the pandemic.

Keywords Love, fear, quarantine, pandemic, social distancing.

COVID19 pandemic and the lockdown has laid considerable impact on almost all the sections of the society. The predicament of the society has touched the sensibilities of writers. The writers have expressed their experiences through stories, fiction, non-fiction and poetry. There are many Indian writers who have penned their thoughts on this pandemic and lockdown experiences. These

writings have been referred to as lockdown literature, a literature which deals with the emotions like – fear, rejection, loneliness, uncertainty – and all those emotions that were predominant during the time of lockdown.

Shobha De released an e-book, *Leaving and Other Stories – Lockdown Liasons*, which is a collection of ten stories that deals with the struggle of the common people during lockdown. About this book De herself has observed, "As a storyteller, I started to look beyond myself . . . listen and observe. The initial introspection gradually transformed into a chorus of voices. Let's just call the book a response to the emotional pandemic inside all our hearts" (Dhar, De). De had started writing the book within a week of the lockdown.

Gayatri Gill, a Mumbai based author, producer and script writer, penned *The Day Before Today – Lockdown Stories* as a response to her observations during lockdown. About her stories she herself has said, "I started writing in the first week of lockdown. After putting down the first story, I shared it on whatsApp, my friends really liked it. Then one more and one more – they grew organically. For me these were little windows to escape my reality" (Dhar, Gill).

Siddharth Gigoo has written *Love in the Time of Quarantine* in just twenty-one days. Gigoo has self published this novel as e-book on Amazon kindle. The march of the migrant workers during lockdown due to COVID19 pandemic inspired Gigoo to write this short fiction, *Love in the Time of Quarantine*. It has two parallel stories; one is of lovers separated by time zones due to lockdown and the other is of migrant family struggling for their basic requirements of food and shelter during lockdown imposed by the government for the welfare of the people due to COVID19 pandemic. About his book he himself has observed, "On the third or fourth day of lockdown, I saw this family – parents, two kids and dog just walking. They were the only ones walking on that hot blazing

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

afternoon. I was stuck by the universality of their suffering" (Dhar, Gigoo). For Gigoo these words found expression because the sight of the family transported him to his life thirty years before when he too had to leave his home in Kashmir due to militant attacks. After leaving his home he reached Jammu all alone and with no idea about his life, how he will get to eat, to sleep or how his future would be. Gigoo could emotionally correlate the sufferings of the migrant family with his past experiences and it resulted in his writing of *Love in the Time of Quarantine*.

Siddharth Gigoo is a multifaceted Indian novelist, short story writer and short film maker. He holds a Master's degree in English Literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University. The collection of his literary and creative work includes books, poems, short stories and short films. He is author of fiction books – *The Garden of Solitude* (2011), *A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* (2015), *A Long Dream of Home* (Bloomsbury India), *Mehr* (2018), *Once We Had Everything* (Literature in Exile) – Co-edited (2019), *The Lion of Kashmir* (2020), *Love in the Time of Quarantine* (2020). Two books of his poems, *Fall and Other Poems* and *Reflections* were published by Writer's Workshop, Kolkata. His writings have appeared in several literary magazines. Siddhartha has co-founded *Daalaan*, a Hindi literary magazine.

Gigoo has written and directed two short films. His *The Last Day* is set against of the exodus and exile of Kashmir Pandits from their homeland Kashmir, India, in 1990. The film was selected for the 6<sup>th</sup> International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala, the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual FilmAid Film Festival (Kenya), the International Film Festival of Cinematic Arts-Short and Micro Cinema (Los Angeles), the 11<sup>th</sup> International Exile Film Festival (Sweden), the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival (Mumbai) and the Lucerne International Film Festival (Switzerland). His other short film is Goodbye Mayfly. The film was selected for the Competition section of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Documentary and Short film festival of Kerala (2015).

He is recipient of many prizes. He won the Commonwealth Short Story Prize for Asia in 2015 for his short story *The Umbrella Man. A Fistful of Earth and Other Stories* was long listed for the Frank O' Connor International Short Story Award in 2015. His stories have been long listed for Lorian Hemingway Short Story Prize in 2018, Royal Society of Literature's V. S. Pritchett Short Story Prize in 2018 and Sean O'Faolain Short Story Prize in 2019. In 2021, his short story *Elephant's Tusk* won the New Asian Short Story Prize.

Siddharth Gigoo is a tech-professional with a job of Senior Consultant at Tata Consultancy Services based in Mumbai, Maharashtra. At his professional front too he has achieved several awards and honours.

Gigoo has self published this novel as e-book on Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) because getting the possibility of publishing the book in hard copy was bleak due to the uncertainty that prevailed everywhere and in every sphere of life. On the second day of the lockdown, i.e. 25 March 2020, Gigoo posted a story on his instagram handle that he is going to write a novel in twenty-one days. In one corner of his mind a thought troubled him if it was an impossible resolution. But then he remembered writers who have confined themselves in their houses and cabins to complete their literary accomplishments. He also remembered Booker Prize winner, Kazuo Ishiguro who could write The Remains of the Day in four weeks, and then he too could write a novel in twenty-one days. And then a story started taking shape in his mind and he completed Love in the Time of Quarantine in twenty-one days. With its completion he had before him the question of publishing it. The nationwide lockdown had imposed uncertain restrictions and the publishers were not taking publishing work. With this, his dream of making his book available for the readers in twenty-one days would fail. Fear and uncertainty prevailed on his dream. Therefore he decided to self publish it on Amazon. Gigoo took the challenge imposed by himself, accepted it himself and worked on it himself.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

The book has been told from multiple points of view. The story of the book is spread in thirty days and nights in the life of the two lovers and a homeless family during the nationwide lockdown. The plot of the book has two parallel stories. One is of two lovers who are separated because of lockdown and the other is of a homeless family of four; including father, mother, a boy and a girl, impacted by the lockdown. "My e-book tells the story of the privilege of the lovers, who have the luxury to stay apart, and the misfortune of the homeless family who are told by the authorities to stay separate", Siddhartha has shared with Chaudhuri about the plot of the story. The e-book is divided into chapters; *The Celebration, The Preparation, The Race, The Purging, The Question, The Cleansing, The Game, The Room, The Sleep, The Savings, The Act, The Cure, The Expulsion, The Farewell,* and *Lhe long Walk Back Home*. The narration in each chapter is carefully based on its title.

The first chapter of the book, The Celebration, celebrates the clapping from balconies of the people of the nation as a gesture to show gratitude to the frontline workers for the corona virus fight after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech. The boy in the book asks his father, "why are they so happy? . . . why are they clapping?" (LTQ, 13). He gets an answer from his father, "for us, son . . . because something good is about to happen". The lockdown and social distancing to flatten the corona virus curve made the lives of homeless people difficult. The homeless family in the book is taken to some place where they can get food and shelter and they will be safe from being infected with corona virus. Therefore they have to hurriedly prepare themselves to move to the safe place. This preparation is being mentioned in the chapter, The Preparation (LTQ, 16) of the book. Then in the chapter, The Race the man commands the woman to move fast or else they will miss the bus that is taking them to the safe place. The woman bursts, "do you want me to die already?". To this the man says to her, "is it my fault that we have no time left?" (LTO, 19). The sudden lockdown imposed made the authorities to take immediate action and therefore the homeless families were hurriedly taken away to safe

places with food and shelter (*The Purging*, *LTQ*, 22). The girl wants to take her dog as well, but her father does not let her do that, "the dog is safer here, darling, than there" (*LTQ*, 22). This gives a clear hint that animals are not affected with corona virus.

The son raises before his father the question, "what wrong have I done now?" (*The Question, LTQ,* 25). This is a pertinent question of the son who is innocent of the corona virus pandemic. But it highlights that the common, homeless and poor people though are not at fault; had to suffer. The son further asks his father, "Daddy, daddy, are all of them going to their new homes too?". He gets an answer from his father, "didn't I tell you, son, that this day was going to come?" (*LTQ,* 25). In the chapter, *The Cleansing*, the homeless family is sprinkled with sanitizer. The child cannot understand to what effect the sanitizer lays on the body. For him the sprinkling of sanitizer is like rain and therefore he asks his father, "why is the rain so prickly, daddy?" (*LTQ,* 28). The use of sanitizers became common since the corona virus pandemic. Every other person frequently keeps on washing hands and sanitizing them due the fear of being infected with the novel virus.

In the chapter, *The Game*, the child wants to come closer to his father; the father does not allow him to do so. He says, "listen, my darling, remember the game; you stay in that box, I stay in this box; cross this line, and you will lose two points"  $(LTQ,\ 31)$ . The nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of corona virus has imposed to social distancing as well. Therefore, the child was made to stay away from his father in the new shelter. The two lovers in the book too are separated from each other.

The social distancing norms has prevented many to meet each other, the parents cannot meet their children who are away from them, the children cannot help and support their elderly parents in the time of crisis due to the pandemic, many couples too were forced to stay apart due to sudden lockdown.

In the chapter, *The Room*, the father whispers to his wife pointing to a window in the room they were taken to stay that, "we

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

will jump from there, if it comes to that"... to this the mother asks, "with them or without them?" (LTQ, 34). The father intends to kill themselves if they have to starve and the woman intends to ask if they will end their life along with their two children. This predicament is an indication to many helpless and distressed people who have either ended their life or have attempted to end their life as they could not meet the requirements of their life or else could not find ways to meet them during the lockdown.

The chapter, *The Sleep*, the boy looking at her sister who is sleeping says, "at last, she's not complaining of hunger anymore" (*LTQ*, 37). The problem of meals was before many during the lockdown either because of lack of money or because of closure of all the mess and restaurants; and therefore many organizations and independent volunteers came forward to help the needy person by providing them the meals. In the chapter, *The Savings*, the girl slips a slice of bread she is offered in her new shelter into her pocket for the other day. But her father assures her that she will get more the following day and her mother expresses worries over not getting bread the following day. This is an instance of the fact that availability of food remained a major problem with many during the lockdown

In the chapter, *The Act*, looking at the girl who is not waking up the boy fears if she is dead. The man assures him that she is just pretending and not really dead. The fear of infection and death among people was predominant during the outbreak of virus infection. The family, along with others, soon is then ordered by the authorities to go back to their homes from where they have come from. To this the girl insists on staying in that room and asks her father the reason for not staying in the room; as she finds the room more comfortable than her regular place of staying. Her father is unable to answer her in a satisfying manner, as he himself as no answer. But the homeless family is worried about their future in the time of crisis. Finally, the family has to move on foot with the girl sitting on her father's shoulder to their home back in the chapter,

The Long Walk Back Home. This elucidates the various instances of the nationwide mass moving of the migrant workers that happened during the imposition of lockdown and the news of which appeared in various social media. And the e-book ends with an *Afterword*, "we are all refugees except that some of us are never home" (*LTQ*, 56).

The parallel story that runs with the story of the homeless family is the story of the two lovers. This story reveals the problem of the lovers who are separated due to lockdown for thirty-days. And towards the end the lovers confess that, "you and i will be immune to things that make us to part" (LTQ, 57). For the present virus infection it has been repeatedly appealed by the medical personals to boost immunity to remain unaffected by the virus.

Though the title of the book is *Love in the Time of Quarantine*, it deals with multiple issues along with the issue of the two lovers during the lockdown due to pandemic.

Gigoo in his short e-book *Love in the Time of Quarantine* which he completed in twenty-one days has effectively figured out the problems; like the problem of food, shelter and safety from the virus infection; faced by the poor and homeless people due to sudden lockdown and social distancing norms imposed because of the pandemic and the help and support that was extended by the administration. Gigoo's *Love in the Time of Quarantine* is a literature written during pandemic which reflects upon the fear and uncertainty that prevailed in the lives of many due to the pandemic.

### Note

The e-book *Love in the Time of Quarantin*e of Siddhartha Gigoo selected for the present study and quoted in the body of the present research paper is abbreviated as LTQ while referring to it.

### **Works Cited**

Chaudhuri, Indrojit D. Love in the time of Quarantine: Author Siddhartha Gigoo writes an e-book in 21 datys.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

- YSWeekender, uploaded on 26 April 2020,
- yourstory.com/weekender/siddharth-gigoo-love-duringquarantine-novel?fbclid=IwARIRIZHvLKJMBEFppa-S0hWhvTnXCE7mB\_2\_rVK2uyDpYKFWniP2X5tvZek, accessed on 27 February 2021.
- Dhar, Shobita. *Pen and the Pandemic: Lockdown Literature Coming to Your Shelf.* TNN, uploaded on 7 July 2020, timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pen-the-pandemiclockdown-literature-coming-to-your-bookshelf/articleshow/76232549.cms, accessed on 11 February 2021.
- Gigoo, Siddharth. *Love in the Time of Quarantine*. Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP), 2020, ASIN: B086WLSNTZ.
- Gigoo, Siddharth. *Publishing and the Pandemic, Is self-publishing a solution in the time of the pandemic? One writer found a way.* Scroll.in, uploaded on 20 May 2020,
- scroll.in/article/962383/is-self-publishing-a-solution-in-the-timing-of-the-pandemic-one-writer-found-a-way, accessed on 27 February 2021.
- Gigooo, Siddhartha. *Siddhartha Gigoo*. siddharthagigoo.com/, accessed on 3 March 2021.
- $Wikipedia, the free \, encyclopedia. \, \textit{Siddhartha Gigoo}.$
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddhartha\_Gigoo#cite\_note-15, accessed on 2 March 2021

# Dr. Archana A Gupta

Assistant Professor , Department of English Smt. Binzani Mahila Mahavidyalaya Nagpur.

# The Repercussions of a Pandemic in Anne Porter's *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider*

### Priya D. Wanjari Akshara Rohankar

### Abstract

As post-apocalyptic literature has always guaranteed a representation of the world's catastrophes, the Covid-19 pandemic has swayed people to seek solace under its shade. Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* found immense relevance in the current times. This paper articulates Anne Porter's semi-autobiographical central character Miranda's tryst with the 1918 pandemic, broadening out on the ways that a pandemic affects lives, globally. Taking into account the traumatic experience, historical perspective, and psychological aftermath of a colossal event, helps to understand the magnitude of it in retrospect. Anne Porter's novel brings out these fine nuances that define history along with having a cascading effect on the present. This paper aims to engage its readers with a gist of the repercussions that a pandemic posits on the masses.

**Keywords** Pandemic, post- apocalyptic, anxiety, historical, psychological, traumatic, repercussions, identity.

### Introduction

Pandemics have been recurrent throughout history and have tremendous power to shape and reshape our past, present and future. The fear it commands is reminiscent of the fragility of human beings, their vulnerabilities and the tragic consequences of pandemics. The apocalyptic impulsethat it entails finds a profound place in the global literary discourse. Apocalyptic and postapocalyptic fiction in modern literature reflects the zeitgeist of the

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

trying and tough times. It bridges the gap between history and memory for its readers. It is an assurance for the modern reader that such calamities have occurred before and we have managed to survive through it.

These accounts help us see the strength and resilience of the human minds in overcoming challenges as well as their shortcomings. During such events, literature provides comfort, companionship, and relief, albeit temporarily. Pandemic fear forms a crucial place in literature. Quite a few literary texts have done justice in treating the topic with fairness and equal sensibility. Notable works include *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) by Daniel Defoe; *The Betrothed* (1827) by Alessandro Manzoni; *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) by Jack London; *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) by Virginia Woolf, and *The Plague* (1947) by Albert Camus. Amongst these, the most significant and faithful reflection of the pandemic fear and its repercussions is found in Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, first published in 1939.

Pale Horse, Pale Rider takes place in the pandemic of 1918, one of the earliest and most severe catastrophes to strike humankind in modern history. Out of the few references of the ghastly 1918 pandemic that changed the course of history, in literature, Porter's story is the most telling record of the outbreak. Her work is the only novel that features the protagonist as directly affected by the virus and survives to recount the disastrous experience. The poignancy of the narration revives memories of calamities that leave a lasting impression on everyone.

The opening of the short novel describes a vivid nightmare that the protagonist Miranda endures. Miranda sees herself desperately racing away on horseback from Death, who is shown as a pale rider. Death, as the pale rider, has already taken away her grandfather, an aunt, a cousin, her "decrepit hound and a silver kitten". As he advances toward her, she realizes that "he is no stranger to her". The choice of words and the ensuing atmosphere is that of fear of death. It is the fear of the contagion and losing her

dear ones that she faces. The vivid nightmare is a prelude to the impending din and chaos in the protagonist's life.

In the story, Miranda is a reporter for the Denver newspaper. Weeks before catching the virus, she is in courtship with a young Army officer, Adam Barclay. Adam Barclay nurses an ailing Miranda till she is moved to a hospital unit, as she nears death. As her condition improves, he returns to his unit. Adam also catches the virus but does not survive. The news of his death reaches Miranda as she is still in the medical facility. This puts Miranda is a state of trauma, where she is unable to differentiate between remembering and forgetting, conscious and the unconscious. There is an interplay between remembering and forgetting in her mind. Her experience with the pandemic highlights the trauma one goes through during such horrifying times.

Literature forms a medium for traumatic memory for the author to voice her fear of the pandemic. Through fictionalizing her experience, Porter is making a connection with the numerous people who have undergone the same pain and suffering. Her story forms a permanent memory which connects the surviving to the dead and the past to the present. She feels a sense of responsibility to remember the dead and to lament over the misery of the pandemic. Referring to the traditional spiritual that Miranda and Adam have been discussing, Miranda identifies herself with the singer. Miranda tells Adam, "but not the singer, not yet. Death always leaves one singer to mourn" (304). She associates herself with the one survivor who is always there to mourn the loss of the dead. As the dead are gone and have no memory, it becomes the responsibility of the survivors to remember the loss and carry on the memory of the dead. The survivor is unable to forget the past.

### Traumatic experience

Miranda undergoes severe trauma as she is unable to get a control over her conscious self and the real surrounding. She is caught between forgetting the tragic episode and remembering her loved ones go through it. The novel explores the several kinds of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

traumatic experience one may encounter- personal trauma, cultural trauma, historical trauma and aesthetic trauma. Porter's story gains credibility as it is placed in a historical context of the worst pandemic, along with being a personal traumatic experience. In the backdrop of current tumultuous scenario, this plays a significant role in preventing the past from fading.

In his renowned work Writing History, Writing Trauma. famous historian Dominick LaCapra notes, "some of the most powerful forms of modern art and writing...often seem to be traumatic writing or post- traumatic writing." (23).. By incorporating her personal traumatic experience in *Pale Horse*, Pale Rider, Porter makes her story powerful and unforgettable. Her text's language and structure has a cycle of remembering and forgetting. She repeatedly uses the words which hint at a cycle of remembering and forgetting. In the opening dream sequence of the story, Miranda says, "where is the lank greenish stranger [the pale rider] I remember hanging about the place?" (270). At another instance, on waking up from the dream about the pale rider, she says, "a single word struck in her mind, a gong of warning, reminding her for the day long what she forgot happily in sleep, and only in sleep. The war, said the gong...Dangling her feet idly with her slippers hanging, she was *reminded* of the way all sorts of persons sat upon her desk at the newspaper office" (271;emphasis added). The language of memory is recurrent throughout as Miranda struggles to draw a line between remembering and forgetting. The words "remember", "reminder", "memory", "forget", "forgotten" are used a myriad number of times.

Porter and Miranda's trauma is interweaved into memory which also affects their identity as an individual. Such disruptive events change the identity of the person. Explaining how the pandemic has affected her, Porter told in an interview in 1963,

It simply divided my life, cut across it like that. So that everything like that was just getting ready, and after that I was in some strange way altered, really. It took me a long

time to go out and live in the world again. I was really "alienated," in the pure sense. It was, I think, the fact that I really had participated in death, that I knew what death was, and had almost experienced it. I had what the Christians call the "beatific vision," and the Greeks called the "happy day," the happy vision just before death. Now if you have had that, and survived it, come back from it, you are no longer like other people, and there's no use deceiving yourself that you are.

Porter had been near death and had a chilling experience which altered her very personality as a human being. She can no longer go back to her previous identity. Trauma alters the very person as a victim. By reading Porter's narration of the pandemic, readers too get connected to the story and become a part of it. Psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Dori Laub explains about trauma, "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event" as a victim constructs a narrative of their experience (Bearing Witness, p. 57).Readers are in a position to absorb the context and draw a significant lesson or experience from it. They are able to find meaning in their own suffering.

While traversing the story of Porter in a fictionalized character of Miranda, the reader feels the same emotions of having gone through the pandemic. The fear that grips Miranda also overcomes the reader with grief; the reader finds a glimpse of their life in the loss of a loved one of Miranda; one can ponder upon the personal experiences of facing such a traumatic situation and overcoming it. In retrospect, one's personal struggle seems to be coming full circle in recognizing the loss, seeking solace in similar stories and finding the strength to overcome it.

# Historical perspective:

There is a practical emphasis on the need to remember the survivors' account of the memories of the pandemic as it is essential to connect the memories to a social identity of the survivors. Without a collective memory, the experience of the pandemic is liable to becoming isolated and individualized, perhaps even

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

obsolete. Succeeding generations can forget the events. Jan Assman explains in *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity* about the essentiality of shared memories in the formation and preservation of social identity. Under historical context, it is significant as it helps remember an important part that affects humankind. Without documenting history, we would never be able to the know the actual toll such tragedies take on human lives.

Had Porter not documented her sorrow of losing a dear one, millions of readers would have been devoid of finding a place of recluse to find a meaning of their own loss and grief. Millions other would not have been able to feel the grave morosity such calamities bring in people's lives. Stories of suffering teach us to be empathetic for others as well as grateful for ourselves for being in a better place. Acknowledging people's trauma is an important aspect of a culture as it helps nurture relationships. It is a bridge between people and society. It is what makes humans, humans. It is the birth of a collective conscience of a society. Being empathetic is at the core of all values.

Finding a healthy space to voice one's ordeal and share experiences is of utmost importance. It helps in healing while also helping the survivors make sense of their uncanny experiences. Being able to release emotions in a culture which recognizes the loss can prove to be therapeutic. Certain cultures do not encourage the expression of emotions, which can have a highly negative impact on its communities. When others are empathetic and ready to lend an ear, the somber experiences seem bearable as the person continues to live with it for a lifetime. In each other's pain, it is possible to find some solace and strength. Bringing together scattered stories helps impart the feeling that the survivors are not alone and have company of several others. Another way it is useful is that it builds history through stories. Placing an event in the right historical perspective enables later generations to understand their history and culture. There is a precise account of the major events, opening venues for study and understanding the nuances of a calamity. Under the context of weaving together individual survival accounts,

communities of people are able to connect and bond through them.

### Psychological impact/relevance of our time:

The occurrence of Covid-19 has had far- reaching effects besides the serious socio-economic impact. People have been immensely affected mentally as it made the masses realize the precarious life conditions that exist. The sufferings have exacerbated the feelings of fragmentation and isolation. Being away from one's own near and dear ones had taken a toll on the mental health of many. During such distressful times, a lot of readers turned to books to find some comfort. Being overcome by fear of the unpredictable was rife and reading a novel on past pandemics assures a kind of comfort as the reader finds a connection with the story. It is a relaxing and rejuvenation experience. The events in the novel seems familiar and reassuring. The fear of the contagion, the caution of moving around freely, of staying safe from the invisible enemy, the increasing distance from people around us, and the anticipating freedom from such daunting times finds an echo in the book. The reader goes through a soothing end in the novel and feels secure knowing that this too shall pass.

Survivors of such deadly contagions often find themselves entangled in the what-ifs of all the situations. William Maxwell's elegiac novel *They Came Like Swallows*, the characters are haunted by all the what-ifs: what if they had chosen the next train car rather than the first one? What if they had taken their child out of school earlier and been safe? What if they had not entered that particular room that day? Such thoughts keep lingering with a sense of guilt and an ardent wish to reverse or replay everything. Just one chance to do things differently. Readers are able to associate with these contexts and find relief and company in it. It proves to be a cathartic act. Porter's central character too has an underlying guilt, which manifests in a nightmare where an invisible bow shoots arrows at her beloved Adam. He dies again and again even though she repeatedly attempts to intervene and save him.

The ruins of a pandemic are marked on the existence of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

mankind with a melancholy that is timeless. It is evident in the surroundings and is a reminder of the helplessness of humans in the face of a massive calamity. Jayanta Mahapatra's poem *The Abandoned Cemetery at Balasore, India* depicts this damage in powerful terms. He talks of the 'ruins of stone and marble' as the 'coma of alienated decay'. Cholera has wiped out huge crowds and now the 'forgotten dead' have their names engraved on epitaphs as he walks around. The deadly epidemic has taken away everything and neither empires nor the ancestors' conquest seems important. Only the graves and ruins are a telling story of the disease and disaster that unfolded on the masses. The atmosphere of 'timeless ennui' that Mahapatra so beautifully conjures in his poem is evident of the aftermath that a pandemic brings about.

Apart from all the works that abound in writing about the external elements of suffering, a major aspect that remains to be addressed is the internal ailments of a body brought about by the virus. The state of affliction that the virus puts on the person occupies an important place in life and shapes the psyche of the person affected by it. However, finding mention of the physical disabilities is rare. Writer Virginia Woolf who was one of the survivors of the 1918 pandemic, had her heart damaged by the virus. She laments in her essay "On Being Ill" how art leaves out the expression of illness and the body. Woolf writes, "those great wars which the body wages by itself...in the solitude of the bedroom against the assault of fever" go unrecorded. Finding that illness does not get much mention in works and expecting it to be a subject, Woolf further says,

To hinder the description of illness in literature, there is the poverty of the language. English, which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, has no words for the shiver and the headache. It has all grown one way..

Woolf's concern is righteous as it points out to the fact that illness does no get noted in any work. A major event like war has myriads of works containing the theme, but very few has pandemic

as its subject. Illnesses are hardly reflected in literature. Physical ailments brought about by a pandemic take away a person's happy state of mind. They hinder the ability of the mind to think clearly. The condition of the body affects how we see the world, transforming an enthusiastic life into a dreadful one. Porter's way of depicting this side is through intricately weaving the delirium state into her prose, projecting din and chaos of the virus through the use of broken syntax. The intervening nightmares and dreamscapes also contributing to this pandemonium of the body. Miranda's state of mind and body echoes the disruption as, "the terrible compelling pain running through her veins like heavy fire." *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is regarded as a war novel primarily, captures the physical and mental exhaustion of an illness.

### A changing world order:

Events of a colossal magnitude prompt a change in world order by remodeling the priorities and preferences. In sociology, such events of prime importance and consequence are known as focusing events. The interaction between people and focusing events like wars and pandemics leave a lasting impression on the way they perceive things and the world around them. It gives rise to greed, avarice, selfishness, and the world is no more like before. Being selfish is equated to being caring for oneself. A dearth of resources during the Covid19 spread panic and masses were overcome with avarice for materialistic things. The dynamics of a peaceful life are turned topsy- turvy by the rearrangement in life's priorities. A rise in materialistic attitude of the masses realigned the greater ethos of the world.

### Conclusion

As we slowly emerge out of our shells into a world that has been distanced from the warmth of relations and bereft of meaning, we must remember that normalcy shall return only with our combined efforts. Marching towards constructing a new way of life would require added strength but that is exactly where the beauty of

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

living lies, in trying to rise with zeal and vigor each time we fall. And after everything has been cleared of the drudgery, we have literature to fall back upon and find comfort. As Porter says, "They (the arts) are what we find again when the ruins are cleared away.".Arts will continue to foster the greater good of humankind. It is upon us to strike a connection with it and imbibe its truthfulness.

### **Works Cited**

- Assman, Jan. Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. New German Critique 65, 1995.
- LaCapra, Dominick. Writing History, Writing Trauma. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.
- Porter, Katherine Anne. Flowering Judas. The Modern Library, 1940.
- Pale Horse, Pale Rider. New York: The Modern Library, 1939.
- Porter, Katherine Anne. Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews George Plimpton. 1963.
- Woolf, Virginia. "On Being Ill." 1930.
- Mahapatra, Jayant. (2005). Random Descent. Orissa: Third Eye Communications.
- Maxwell, William. (1997). They Came like Swallows. Vintage Publication.
- https://theconversation.com/why-remembering-matters-for-healing-94565
- https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6184364
- https://www.thehindu.com/books/whos-afraid-of-a-virus-wolf/article31172069.ece
- https://www.jstor.org/stable/23208856?seq=1#metadata\_info\_t ab contents

https://hornbakelibrary.wordpress.com/2019/08/13/what-a-history-katherine-anne-porters-pale-horse-pale-rider-at-80/

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18850.On\_Being\_Ill https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24738824/

Principal and Head, Department of English, Santaji Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur. **Akshara Rohankar** Research Scholar, Nagpur.

Dr. Priya D. Wanjari

# Exploring the grim picture of a pandemic in Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year

### G. R. Hashmi

### **Abstract**

A Journal of the Plague Year is a work of fiction camouflaged as a work of fact. It reads as if it were an unadorned account of the individual experiences of someone who survived the epidemic of bubonic plague that struck London in the summer of 1665. As the epidemic takes hold in the outer parishes of London, the affluent, together with the royal court, close their houses and run off. Merchants try to find refuge on their ships moored on the Thames. The poor have nowhere to go. Astrology and superstition prosper. Some see an opening to make fast cash by taking benefit of a ready market for useless prophylactics and counterfeit cures. Magistrates are forced to take emergency measures to restrain the stretch of the infection. They direct that households containing an infected person should be shut up and a watchman appointed to ensure that no one escapes; that graves be dug at least six feet deep (a practice that has persisted ever since in England); that extra people are employed to carry away and bury the dead. Even so, mortality continues to increase. Literature plays an important role in being the chronicle of such events and is imperative in sounding the bell of warning for the future generations. This and more will be deliberated in the ensuing paper.

Keywords Journal, plague, pandemic, grimness, negative impact.

In this time, such as a major biological crisis like the corona virus pandemic, the humanities, and history and literature in particular, offer important insights into how people have dealt with the trauma of pandemics in the past, and how to make sense of a world now in many ways beyond our control. If history illustrates the effect of pandemics on whole communities, then literature gives us a more intimate view. Literature takes us beyond statistics of global deaths and degree of spread to show how the crisis has affected the individual lives of those infected as well as their friends, families and neighbors. As several cultural commentators have noted in the last few weeks, there has been a sharp uptick in the popularity of literary works dealing with plagues, epidemics and other forms of biological crises.

Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year is a firstperson, mostly nonlinear narrative told by protagonist H.F., an unmarried saddler whose name is only discovered by his signature at the closing stages of the work. The Journal is a fiction of his experiences during the plague that afflicted London in 1665; the work is thus fiction but is supported with statistics, data, charts, and government documents. H.F. begins by linking rumors that the plague had come to Holland, and closely follows the bills of transience. Certain parishes are affected, but cold weather seems to stave off the nastiest of the plague during the winter. However, in May and June the numbers of dead begin to sway upwards and H.F. starts to wonder whether or not he should leave the city. After some pondering back and forth, he decides that God wants him to stay behind. H.F. observes that the affluent are leaving the city and the underprivileged are being strongly affected by the distemper. He relates how they succumbed to the tricks of quack doctors, fortunetellers, mountebanks, and astrologers in their terror and apprehension of the looming plague.

City officials are lucid and organized regarding the dispersion of the plague, and publish the Orders of the Lord Mayor and

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Aldermen of the City of London. These set up rules and regulations for the rendezvous of searchers and examiners and watchmen to safeguard the houses, for the shutting up of infected houses, and for the shutting down of events in which large groups of people would assemble. H.F. is in general against the shutting up of houses, commenting that it seemed to do more damage than good in most cases and could barely avert the plague from thinning out because Londoners found ways to get away or deceive the city officials.

H.F. tells many stories of how the people of London were affected by the plague. These stories comprise tales of anguished fathers, distraught men running through the streets, people throwing themselves into burial pits due to twinge or angst, husbands trying to support their families, people blaspheming the name of God, houses being looted, and people trying to break away from the city and travel to other towns in search of acquittal. H.F. is fanatical to expose rumors that all was bedlam in the city during the plague; he is compassionate to the predicament of the poor and refuses to believe the disgusting rumors that surround the days of plague. He relates many stories of clemency, charity, and emancipation.

H.F.'s narrative is long-winded, digressive, and often at times conflicting, and he repeats several subjects over and over again – predominantly the shutting up of houses and his certainty that the only way to endure the plague is to run away from it. He believes he committed a mistake in remaining in the city, and confesses his sins to God and begs for absolution. He spends his time shut up in his house for days on end, and when he can stand it no longer, he walks about the city. He muses on the causes of the plague and how it is multiplying, rejecting bizarre explanations but concluding that, while it must have some human causes, it is a form of some divine punishment.

As he writes, he includes updated bills of mortality that trace the numbers dead from plague, which grow exponentially as the outbreak rages. He commends the city officials for their rational conduct, lauding the fact that there were never scores of dead bodies in the street, that provisions never fell to dangerous levels, and charitable measures were put in place to help the poor. Unfortunately, foreign trade takes some time to revive because those engaged in commerce avoid London.

September is the worst month of the plague, but eventually the bills begin to reveal that the distemper is abating. Less people were becoming infected and those who were ill were getting better much faster. For a while this information actually has a negative impact, as the people who saw the bills became careless and accidentally spread the plague even further, but thankfully the evidence that the plague was disappearing was validated some time later. H.F. observes that while many people are truly grateful for their deliverance and try to live their lives differently, most return to their old, sinful ways and appear to have learned nothing from their trials. H.F. ends his narrative with a small verse exulting that he survived.

It is observed that A Journal of the Plague Year begins quietly, without any apparatus of learnedness. H. F. watches the bills of mortality mount—he keeps track—and he debates with himself whether to stay in town or flee. His brother tells him to save himself, get away. But no, H.F. decides to stay. He listens. He walks around. He sees a man race out of an alley, apparently singing and making clownish gestures, pursued by women and children—surgeons had been at work on his plague sores. "By laying strong caustics on them, the surgeons had, it seems, hopes to break them—which caustics were then upon him, burning his flesh as with a hot iron." H.F. hears screams—many different kinds of screams, and screeches, and shrieks. In an empty street in Lothbury, a window opens suddenly just over his head. "A woman gave three frightful screeches, and then cried, 'Oh! death, death, death!'" There was no other movement. The street was still. "For people had no curiosity now in any case."

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

At the plague's height, H.F. writes, there were no funerals, no wearing of black, no bells tolled, no coffins. "Whole streets seemed to be desolated," he says, "doors were left open, windows stood shattering with the wind in empty houses for want of people to shut them. In a word, people began to give up themselves to their fears and to think that all regulations and methods were in vain, and that there was nothing to be hoped for but an universal desolation."

We know that Defoe, late in life, wrote the first English novels—*Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, about a lonely sailor who sees a man's naked footprint on the beach, and *Moll Flanders* in 1722, about a woman who was "twelve year a whore." We know that he was born about 1660, the son of a London butcher or candlemaker named James Foe. In his twenties, Daniel went into business as a hosier—that is, as a seller of women's stockings. Trade and speculation went well for a while, then less well, and then he had to hide from his creditors, to whom he owed seventeen thousand pounds. He was rescued by friends on high, and began writing pamphlets and poetry.

Soon he was running a large company that made roofing tiles—and the pamphleteering was surprisingly successful. He added a Frenchifying "de" to his name. In 1701 he produced the most-selling poem up to that time, "The True-Born Englishman," which hymned his native land as a motley nation of immigrants: "Thus, from a mixture of all kinds began / That het'rogenous thing, an Englishman." Another pamphlet—in which, several decades before Swift's "Modest Proposal," he pretended to be a rabid high-churchman who advocated the deportation or hanging of nonconformists—got him clamped in a pillory in 1703 and sent to Newgate Prison.

While in prison he started a newspaper, the *Review*, an antecedent to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, which Richard Steele and Joseph Addison would launch within a decade. Besides essays and opinion pieces, the *Review* had an early advice column, and a

"weekly history of Nonsense, Impertinence, Vice, and Debauchery." That same year, still in prison, he gathered intelligence on a disaster that had visited parts of England. His book, *The Storm*—about what he called "the greatest and the longest storm that ever the world saw"—is one of the earliest extended journalistic narratives in English.

For a faker, Defoe had an enormous appetite for truth and life and bloody specificity. He wanted to know everything knowable about trade, about royalty, about lowlife, about the customs of other countries, about ships, about folk-remedies and quack doctors, about disasters, about scientific advances, and about the shops and streets of London. He listened to stories people told him. "In this way of Talk I was always upon the Inquiry," one of his characters says, "asking Questions of things done in Public as well as in Private." But his desire to impersonate and play-act kept surging up and getting him into trouble. He wanted to pass as someone he wasn't—as a French diplomat, as a Turkish spy, as a fallen woman, as a person who'd seen a ghost, as a pre-Dickensian pickpocket.

He was an especially industrious first-person crime writer. Once he ghostwrote the story of a thief and jail breaker named Jack Sheppard. To promote its publication, Defoe had Sheppard pause at the gallows and, before a huge crowd, hand out the freshly printed pamphlets as his last testament—or so the story goes. "The rapidity with which this book sold is probably unparalleled," writes an early biographer, William Lee.

Robinson Crusoe is Defoe's most famous hoax. We describe it as a novel, of course, but it wasn't born that way. On its 1719 title page, the book was billed as the strange, surprising adventures of a mariner who lived all alone for eight-and-twenty years on an uninhabited island, "Written by H I M S E L F"—and people at first took this claim for truth and bought thousands of copies. This prompted an enemy satirist, Charles Gildon, to rush out a pamphlet, "The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Daniel de Foe,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Formerly of London, Hosier, Who has lived above fifty Years all alone by himself, in the Kingdoms of North and South Britain."

Addison called Defoe "a false, shuffling, prevaricating rascal." Another contemporary said he was a master of "forging a story and imposing it on the world as truth." One of Defoe's nineteenth-century biographers, William Minto, wrote: "He was a great, a truly great liar, perhaps the greatest liar that ever lived."

And yet that's not wholly fair. A number of the things that people later took to be Defoe's dazzlingly colorful tapestries of fabrication, weren't. In 1718, in *Mist's Journal*, Defoe gave a detailed account of the volcanic explosion of the island of St. Vincent, relying, he said, on letters he had received about it. A century passed, and doubts crept in. One Defoe scholar said that the St. Vincent's story was imaginary; a second said it was tomfoolery; a third said it was "make-believe" and "entirely of Defoe's invention." But the island of St. Vincent had actually blown up, and it had made a lot of noise as it blew. Defoe had done his journalistic best to report this prodigy.

Something similar happened in the case of *A Journal of the Plague Year*. When Defoe published it, he, as usual, left himself off the title page, ascribing the story to H.F. "Written by a Citizen," the title page falsely, sales-boostingly claimed, "Who Continued All the While in London." People believed that for a while; but by 1780, at least, it was generally known that Defoe was the book's author. Then someone did some arithmetic and realized that Defoe had been a young child when the plague struck London—whereupon they began calling the book a historical novel, unequaled in vividness and circumstantiality. Walter Raleigh, in his late nineteenth-century history of the English novel, called the book "sham history." In a study of "pseudofactual" fiction, Barbara Foley says the *Plague Year* "creates the majority of its particulars." And John Hollowell, investigating the literary origins of the New Journalism, writes that Defoe's book is "fiction masquerading as fact." Is it?

A Journal of the Plague Year is an astounding performance. It's shocking, it's messy, it's moving, it sobs aloud with its losses, it's got all the urgency and loopingly prolix insistence of a man of sympathy who has lived through an urban catastrophe and wants to tell you what it was like. The fear of death, notes H.F., "took away all bowels of love, all concern for one another." But not universally: "There were many instances of immovable affection, pity and duty." And Defoe's narrator is at pains to discount some of the stories that he hears. He is told, for example, of nurses smothering plague victims with wet cloths to hasten their end. But the details are suspiciously unvarying, and in every version, no matter where he encounters it, the event is said to have happened on the opposite side of town. There is, H.F. judges, "more of tale than of truth" in these accounts.

Towards the end of the book, its narrator reflects on how much has been destroyed: lives, livelihoods, and much of the trade on which the economic success of the city depended. But he finds something positive in the way the disaster brought about the reconciliation of people with different religious views: ". . . a close conversing with death, or with diseases that threaten death, would scum off the gall from our tempers, remove the animosities among us and bring us to see with differing eyes than those which we looked on things before."

#### **Works Cited**

A Journal of the Plague Year: Wikipedia. Web

 $Christopher\,Martyn, : A\,Journal\,of\,the\,Plague\,Year.\,Web$ 

Dermot Kavanagh: Daniel Defoe: 'A Journal of the Plague Year' – 1722. Web

Nicholson Baker: 'The Greatest Liar'Is Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* a work of journalism? Web

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Sam Jordison: A Journal of the Plague Year by Daniel Defoe is our reading group book for May. Web

Tyler Stovall: How Literature Can Capture the Essence of Life in a Pandemic. Web

**Dr. G. R. Hashmi**Department of English,
Seth Kesarimal Porwal College of Arts,
Science and Commerce, Kamptee.

# The Impact of Pandemic as Depicted in the Movie 'Contagion'

#### Vandana V. Bhagdikar Reema Kharabe

#### **Abstract**

Art and culture are the reflection of the society and lots of literature has been written on the theme of Pandemic. There are also many movies based on this theme. Films about widespread of virus, plague, and disease are categorized as horror, thriller or fantasy; there are also infinite zombie apocalypse movies. World War Z (2013), investigates a zombie virus pandemic. Outbreak (1995) is based on Ebola-like virus that had spread from a monkey in Zaire. In The Andromeda Strain (1971), an alien organism travels to earth on a crashed satellite and infects Americans. The Plague (1975) depicts the conditions of Bubonic plague. In Carriers (2009) a group of friends set out to find a plague free zone but eventually get infected. Black Death (2010) is a kind of historical movie set on the backdrop of the most brutal Bubonic Plague pandemic in history. This paper will attempt to study the impact of pandemic as depicted in the movie Contagion (2011), an American thriller film directed by Steven Soderbergh.

## Keywords Culture, literature, pandemic, movies, virus

According to WHO, "Pandemic is the worldwide spread of new disease" (WHO). It is a disease, which swiftly engulfs the world

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

in its entrapment and threatens and grasps the life on it. Many a times in a single blow it has cleared, the life on different geographical areas for ages. We have seen the long history of pandemic from the age of hunter-gathers and Agrarian age, where the most common were Malaria, Tuberculosis, leprosy, influenza and smallpox. During the Peloponnesian War in 430 B.C. pandemic spread through Libya, Ethiopia and Egypt. It was suspected to have been typhoid fever, which took 2/3 of the population and the cause of Athenian defeat by Spartans. In 165 A.D Antonine Plague, a kind of smallpox spread among the Romans through the Huns. In 250 A.D. Cyprian Plague entailed diarrhea, vomiting, throat ulcers, fever and gangrenous hands and feet starting from Ethiopia and passing through Northern Africa, into Rome, then into Egypt and Northward and recurring over next three centuries in 444 it hit England where the Saxons came to the rescue and controlled the island. In 541A.D. Justinian plague, in 11<sup>th</sup> century Leprosy, in 1350 The Black Death consumed one third of the population this was the second largest outbreak of the bubonic plague started in Asia and spread throughout Europe1374 A.D. In 1492 the Columbian exchange arrival of the Spanish in the Caribbean and arrival of Christophe Columbus on the Island of Hispaniola spread the diseases in respective islands.

In 1665 The Great Plague of London led to the deaths of 20 percent of London's population. In 1817, First Cholera Pandemic originated in Russia and small intestine infection spread through feces-infected water and food. It encompassed India, Britain, Spain, Africa, Indonesia, China, Japan, Italy, Germany and America. In 1855, the third plague pandemic started in China and moved to India and Hong Kong tolling 15 million deaths. In 1875, Fiji Measles Pandemic, in 1889, Russian Flu, in 1918, Spanish Flu were observed in Europe, The United States and parts of Asia then spread throughout the world claiming 50 million deaths. In 1957, Asian flu, in 1981, HIV/AIDS destroyed person's immune system resulting in

death claiming 35 million people worldwide.2003: SARS (Severe Acute respiratory Syndrome) is believed to have possibly started with bats, spread through cats then to humans in China and then spread throughout many countries in the world claiming many lives and infecting many people. Also the spread of H1N1, Ebola and Zika were controlled in time. In 2019, COVID -19, a Novel Corona virus strain that had not been previously found in people grasped the world. Symptoms are respiratory problems, fever, and cough and can lead to pneumonia and death. Like SARS, it spread through droplets from sneezes. First reported case appeared in China's Hubei province. From China it spread throughout the world and still it is not controlled.

**Contagion** is a 2011 American thriller film directed by Steven Soderbergh. Its ensemble cast includes Marion Cotillard, Matt Damon, Laurence Fishburne, Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Winslet, Bryan Cranston, Jennifer Ehle, and Sanaa Lathan. The plot concerns the spread of a virus transmitted by respiratory droplets and fomites, attempts by medical researchers and public health officials to identify and contain the disease, the loss of social order in a pandemic, Soderbergh's movie is set as a fictional global pandemic, modeled on the outbreak of a bat-prone Nipah Virus, identified in 1991 that killed many people in Malaysia, is close to the COVID-19 pandemic we are facing today. The movie deals with the worst -case scenario of global affliction, where Beth Emhoff (Gwyneth Paltrow) dies suddenly coming into contact with the virus, which she got infected on a business trip to Hong Kong. Her death with minor symptoms of flu assuming it to be a jet-lag, leaves her husband Mitch Emhoff (Matt Damon) and doctors baffled. Death of her son Clark Emhoff on the same day is also disturbing. Soon the people who were in contact with her and her son get infected and the number started growing in Hong Kong, Ukraine, London, Minneapolis Minnesota, Tokyo, San Francisco California and Chicago and a global pandemic explodes.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Dr. Ellis Cheever (Laurence Fishburne), Dr. Erin Mears (Kate Winslet) of the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC) in Atlanta, tries hard to track the spread of the disease by undertaking on the spot visits. Dr. Ellis Cheever, Dr. Erin Mears and Dr. Leonora Orantes (Marion Cotillard) an investigator from the World Health Organization in Geneva are the key players in investigation. BSL-4 labs that are Bio-safety level labs, which is a set of bio containment precautions and are required for isolating dangerous biological agents in an enclosed laboratory facilities are immediately in actions.. Dr. Ally Hextall (Jennifer Ehle), she tries to perfect the vaccine and is impatient with the time being lost before she can test it on human, infact she tries the first human testing vaccine on herself. On the other hand in Minnesota Department of healthcare an autopsy is been carried on the skull of Beth Emhoff though it doesn't lead to any specific conclusion.

The World Health Organization in Switzerland tries to define the sudden outbreak. They discuss about using the same protocol as established for SARS in present situation that of quarantining the complex and screening the symptoms should be followed. The samples from Kowloon in Hong Kong, London, Tokyo and all the first reported cases are under investigation. WHO and CDC jointly requests people to understand that in this present situation their best defense would be social distancing. No hand shaking, staying home when you're sick, washing your hands frequently. Though they couldn't come to the conclusion of the cause and effect, they take decision to close of schools, public places and practice social distancing.

The government machinery start preparing to control the spread of the pandemic. Dave is an officer working with Dr. Erin Mears together finalize a big sport complex for the rescue camp with arrangements of beds for the sick with more to be prepared. People also start reacting to the situation by taking extra precautions. Dave tells Dr. Mears that due the sudden frenzy people

are giving different treatment to the people coming from outdoors citing example of his wife. Dr. Mears replies that it is not overreaction but that's the need of the hour:

**Dave:** My wife makes me take off my clothes in the garage. Then she leaves out a bucket of warm water and some soap. And then she douses everything in hand sanitizer after I leave. I mean, she's overreacting, right? **Dr. Erin Mears:** Not really. And stop touching your face, Dave. (Contagion)

The investigations start and Dr. Erin Mears starts interviewing all those who had come in contact with Beth Emhoff. She asks the workers at AIMMO where she worked, about who had interaction with Beth before she died and comes to know that Aaron Barnes had picked her up from the airport, she contacts him immediately and tells him that he is infected and asks him to get into a secluded place but he dies as soon as he gets down the bus.

Mitch Emhoff who also had come in contact with Beth was kept under quarantine watch. His daughter does not come in contact with Beth as she was away from home. Erin interviews Mitch and is glad to know that he is immune to the disease. She also asks about a layover of his wife in Chicago where he tells that Beth had an affair with John Neal before they were married. He gets disturbed and confused and thinks that was it from Neal that she had received the virus? He also wants to know about Neal's health. but she could not disclose the information, unable to get to the conclusion and disclosure of his wife's cheating on him before her death, he again feels frustrated and helpless. Investigating further CDC comes to know about the first carriers of the virus that would be Beth Emhoff or the Guy in Tokyo. Dr. Erin is very dejected she has just faced a terrible situation where she was dealing with a person who has lost his stepson and wife and that his wife was cheating on him before she died. In the due process Dr. Erin too gets infected, she could not swallow, had severe temperature, headache and she

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

tries hard to call everyone in her contact including the hotel staff to get themselve isolated to prevent the spread. Dr. Cheever asks Lyle Haggerty an official of CDC to bring Dr. Erin back to Atlanta when she was sick but they were helpless as the private aircrafts were in use for political purposes. Here we find that the special treatment and preference is given to the politicians as compared to the common man. She is shifted to the rescue camps in Minnesota with the help of Dr. Cheever but within three days she dies.

In the movie the effect of lockdown in every sphere of life is depicted. Dr. Cheever had a conversation with his wife where he talks about the nursing strike. There is nothing they can do as they were putting healthy people next to the sick people. And hoping healthy people don't get sick. The facilities were falling short taking into consideration the increasing number of sick people. The lockdown and isolation has culminated into chaos, stamping in stores, people getting violent on roads and parking areas. Mitch and his daughter Jory too face such situation in a deserted super shop where they go to collect food items, but reject the idea as they find an infected woman asking for help. They realize the fact that everything might be contaminated so they leave the things behind and get away from there sanitizing their hands. With the shortfall of food packages, there is chaos in the government camps too. One night, Mitch happens to see a gunshot being fired in the opposite house and people stealing something from that house. He goes to find what happens the next day and finds that all the groceries and racks were empty. He takes the gun from the spot with him for protection. Amongst all the anarchy and chaos, Mitch tries to keep his daughter protected by taking extra care of her. He tries to keep her away from her boyfriend Andy by asking him not to meet Jory and also by counseling his daughter about necessity to keep social distancing under the prevalent circumstances.

Another aspect depicted in the movie is that of the treatment given to the infected person after they are dead. Funeral

home refuse to accept Beth and her son's bodies for burial. Beth's mother is disappointed for that she wanted that all of her family should be buried together. They are given the option of cremation, which is the safest in such pandemic situation. The government too falls short of the death bags, as the number of death is proportionally very high.

The situation created due to pandemic also leads to the rise in the crime. We see the humans behaving like animals when their basic needs are compromised or there is the question of their survival. Sun Feng, a Chinese government official who lost his mother to the virus, kidnaps Dr. Orantes, an official of WHO as leverage to obtain first doses of vaccine for the remaining people who are left from his village. He is concerned about the limited people in their village. Apparently WHO official, Damian Leopold gives the consignment of the vaccines to Sun Feng and get Dr. Leonara Orantes back. But when he gave her the real vaccine and tells her that they gave the Chinese the placebo, she feels disgusted of this act. Damian informs her of many such activities of abduction happening all over the world. The supermarkets, grocery stores, pharmacies are crowded and people starts destroying the properties due to lack of resources and unable to cope up with the new way of life.

The movie also presents the haste in the development of the vaccine and the mutation observed in the virus. Dr. Ally Hextall informs Dr. Cheever that MEV-1 has been mutated into African HIV aids population and a new R naught (ie for every person who gets sick, how many other people are they likely to infect is the R naught Ratio. Seasonal flu is 1, small pox is over 3, and polio spread at the rate of 4 and 6. R stands for the reproductory rate of the virus) is found which is more than two. Dr. Ian Sussman of San Francisco has succeeded in growing the MEV-1 vaccine but it is far away from human trials. Dr. Ally Hextall tells Dr. Cheever that they had a viable vaccine but human trials are not carried out and it would take months to figure out production and distribution. As she is restless

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

to try it on the humans, she injects it herself before meeting her dad who was a nurse working tirelessly till he gets infected and was on his deathbed. She goes to meet her dad and reminds of his teaching that Dr. Barry Marshall was one who gave himself a bug and then cured himself and now she is testing vaccine herself.

The movie also deals with the role of Media Mongers. Alan Krumwiede (Jude Law) who is portrayed as a popular blogger, is the first one to notice that the man in Tokyo who died in the bus has something to do with a new virus. He writes in his blogs intimating some disastrous upcoming epidemic. He brings forth the fact that the pharmaceutical companies are making money like Vicks Vaporub and Lysol people made after Spanish Flu in 1918.He also questions about the side-effects of the vaccines. He gives examples of swine flu vaccines that killed people back in 1976. In an interview where Dr. Cheever was also being interviewed, Alan accuses CDC in support of the Pharmaceutical companies. Alan portrays a skeptical view when CDC gives a report on a successful invention of MEV-1 vaccine. To give government a blow he blogs a video of him being sick and taking Forsythia drug and fools people by saying that he recovered by taking the drug. This leads to all the pharmacies being crowded with people to buy the drug of Forsythia. There was even stampede and chaos in various chemists' shops. Meanwhile friend of Alan Lorraine Vasquez who is pregnant asks for Forsythia from Alan, which he rejects and asks her to go as he too knew the truth that he was lying. The rumors are spread through internet and social media which are far more dangerous than the disease itself. In the society we come across such social media mongers who do their best to cross every limits to create a world of suspicion and fear.

Towards the end we find the vaccination drive and restoration of normal life. Government announces the successful trial of MEV-1 vaccine and schedules vaccinations according to birthdays and Dr. Cheever gives vaccine to his wife and he gives his own vaccine to Roger's (CDC office help) son Anthony who is

autistic. Mitch sets up a makeshift prom night for Jory and Andy (Andy now vaccinated) He goes downstairs and sees Jory and Andy dancing and leaves them. But he can't get over the loss of his wife and son and cries seeing the recent pictures from her camera. Finally in a flashback to the spillover event, a bulldozer razes palm trees while clearing a rainforest in China, disturbing some bats' natural habitat. One bat finds shelter in a pig farm and drops an infected piece of banana that is then consumed by a pig. The pig is slaughtered and is prepared by a chef in a Macau casino, who transmits the virus to Beth via a handshake.

Thus the movie, *Contagion* depicts the impact of pandemic on the lives of human beings in particular and society in general. It deals with the responsibilities and duties of human beings in times of crisis. It presents the selfless task of the scientists who tests the vaccines on them so that it gets into the effective production to help control the spread of the disease. It is a thriller with horror uncovering the basic human instinct to save the loved ones and going to the extinct to save humanity. This film by Steven Soderbergh is skillful at telling the story through the lives of several key characters and the casual interactions of many others. It makes it clear that people do not "give" one another a virus; a virus is a life form evolved to seek out new hosts—as it must to survive, because its carriers die, and therefore it must always stay one step ahead of death. In a sense, it is an alien species, and this is a movie about an invasion from inner space.

#### **Works Cited**

- Movie Contagion: retrieved on 17/03/2021https://
  tv.apple.com/in/movie/Contagion/umc.cmc.2jbdxdop7k
  v6s5xj3w2xowink
- Definition of Pandemic: https://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently\_asked\_questions/pandemic/en/retrieved on 19/3/2021

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

- 3. History of outbreak: https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/pandemics-timeline retrieved on 19/03/2021
- 4. Movies reflecting pandemic retrieved on 19/03/2021
- 5. Movies reflecting pandemic. https://filmschoolrejects.com/pandemic-movies/retrieved on 19/03/2021
- 6. Movie Quotes:https://www.moviequotesandmore.com/ Contagion-best-quotes/retrieved on 19/03/2021.

**Dr. Vandana V. Bhagdikar** Principal, Mahila Mahavidyalaya Nagpur.

> **Dr. Reema Kharabe** Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur.

## Coronasutra: Bringing Alive the Life in Lockdown

#### Poorva Bhonde

#### Abstract

For the first time perhaps modern science and modern man felt powerless against a micro virus and as a preventive measure to curb the vicious spread, lockdowns were clamped everywhere. The ever-revolving giant wheel of modern life came to a grinding halt with the announcement of strict lockdowns at all COVID-19 affected places in the world.

The loneliness, monotony and fear psychosis experienced by many needed a channel to express. The leading daily The Times Of India promptly started a column "CORONASUTRA" to provide a platform to all such readers who wish to voice their contrasting feelings like anguish, suffering, sense of loneliness, faith in human ability and occasional optimism through poetry.

The present paper aims at analysing and appreciating selected poems published in CORONASUTRA in order to understand the universality of emotional and mental upheavals experienced by common people during lockdown.

**Keywords** Pandemic, coronasutra, poetry, fear psychosis, optimism.

#### Introduction

We have lived with COVID-19 for over a year now. The time elapsed has helped us better understand the virus that confounded

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

most health experts. The 'Fear Factor' today has lessened to a great extent with the vaccine made available to one and all, although in a phased manner.

It all started just a year back, with the announcement of COVID-19 as a pandemic. Fear-psychosis gripped every heart. The unknown virus started playing havoc not just with the lives but also with every aspect of modern civilization. With the spree of strict lockdown all over the world, life came to standstill, giving rise to an entirely new set of problems-emotional, psychological, social and economical. Confined to four walls and nowhere to go; the anguished, depressed, fearful and sometimes optimistic minds as well, started expressing themselves explicitly all over the world through various forms of literature better known as the Pandemic literature.

Some such poetic expressions contributed by readers were published in the newspapers who wanted to provide space to the reactions of common people to the pandemic COVID-19 in general and the lockdown in specific. The aim of the present article is to appreciate and analyse a few selected poems published by the esteemed daily 'The Times of India' in its column #coronasutra, which had specially been introduced to cover 'the best of locked-down creativity' in the form of poems, illustrations and humorous or thought provoking quotations.

#### Coronasutra: A Kaleidoscope of Life in Lockdown

Though not a piece of great pandemic literature like Camu's novel 'The Plague' or Edger Allen Poe's short story 'Masque of the Red Death'; these poems published in daily 'The Times of India' in the month of August and September 2020 when COVID-19 was at its peak the world-over, are the honest and sincere expression of common man's mind and heart oscillating between helplessess and confidence; despair and hope.

The untitled poem by *Avijeet Das*, speaks of the sense of helplessness which is experienced by one and all when the shadow of pandemic looms large. Initial reaction of the masses to the outbreak of Coronavirus is captured in the most lucid terms:

'In these times when the majority are given a premonition of doom,
When You and I are watching the media and feeling something sinister is going to loom,
When we are being bombarded with messages of the cathosthrope of Coronavirus and feeling the gloom.'
(Untitled, Coronasutra, Times of India-ToI, Aug 2, 2020)

The poem further upholds how the 'New Normal' has changed the very character of the world. It is no more a place of love and warmth. It speaks of the present time as 'the times of using masks and sanitizers'. It is the time "when the world is being painted with shades of hate and fear." The poem further appeals to keep alive everlasting hope in the last stanza through the most assuring lines:

"You come out with positive vibes and energy and use bright colours of love and warmth and paint a beautiful rainbow of hope and good old cheers." (Untitled, Coronasutra, ToI, Aug 2, 2020)

'Purgation of emotion' is one of the functions of literature. Millions of readers of the newspaper who read the poem could have easily identified with the mental upheavals in the poet's mind. They would also have drawn inspiration from the positive note on which the poem ends. The message that the 'shades of hate and fear' could be repainted with the use of bright colours of love and warmth reverberate positivity.

'Empty Street' by Anonymous poet published in the same column on August 5,2020 vividly describes the adverse effect of the strict lockdown on the business community. The inanimate has beautifully been juxtaposed with animate as everything comes to stand still. Trapped inside the house like dummies in the shopwindows, we have no work to do. The skill is being wasted just like the price-tags fading on the clothes.

"Shop-window dummies, Wearing their best behind glasses, As trapped as we are.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Nobody to sell to, No fashion to keep up with, Price tags fading." (The Empty Street, ToI, Aug 5, 2020)

The feeling of emptiness experienced by us all is beautifully captured in the last stanza, in which the poet speaks of our colourful and vibrant **past** in striking contrast with bleak, blank and empty **present** in lockdown where:

"Beautiful blank eyes look out from museum of how we were, once." (The Empty Street, ToI, Aug 5, 2020)

On the contrary, *A.C. Clarke's* poem *'In lockdown'* written in the column 'Coronasutra' around the same period records the positive aspect of Lockdown. Though every human being was affected by the pandemic, Nature remained unaffected. As human activities ceased, Nature bloomed, flourished and breathed a sigh of relief. She got strangely revived.

Lockdown had its blessings too. Ever busy human beings who had no time to 'stand and stare' at the joys of nature around were forced to see the birds 'speed dating like there was no tomorrow'. They could now see "these leaves that push baby fists through railings." It is Nature which comes alive in the lock down. She has been working silently and ceaselessly ever since the birth of this planet; only we the humans had no time to 'stand beneath the boughs and look at the silvery clouds above." A.C. Clarke's poem *In lockdown* captures the joyful sights in the following lines:

Such joyful racket from everyday birds a-chitter. Alive and free they're speed-dating like there was no tomorrow.

And see these leave that push

baby fists through railings?
In a day or two
they'll spread their fingers,
nature
getting on with her business.
(In lockdown, Coronasutra, Aug 4, 2020)

But what about those inanimate objects, the symbols of our modern fast life: fast food, cars, buses and aeroplanes? How the lockdown fixed them to a spot has been vividly described in the last stanza-

"A jackdaw pokes discarded packaging. Cars doze in the parking bays, like horses put out to grass, And down the emptied roads, a bus cruises slow as a ghost ship." (In lockdown, Coronasutra, Aug 4,2020)

The poem contributed to 'Coronasutra' by *Kate Young* aptly titled as 'A Breath of Beauty' is full of optimism; speaking mostly of the bright side of lockdown- the innumerable possibilities to celebrate life silently, leaving aside the fear of coronavirus.

"A flirtation of clouds collide, releasing a silent collusion of vapour seeping into lungs and we fear we may drown.

Lockdown brings meditation, limbs splayed in hazy warmth soft-lined as feline fur absorbing Dawn's early gift slowly, I unwrapped it sliding Sellotape from eyes to unfold a new world. It drops in my lap like a gem. (A Breath of Beauty, Coronasutra, ToI, Aug 2020)

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Once the 'Sellotape' of wrong notions about life and living was unwrapped; the optimistic ones could see the new life in lockdown where there was smiling sunrise, the first blush of the day. As the 'Time stalled' the poet caught

"the shift of the bud to bloom, the way creamy clusters of bawling fists unfurl" and he opened himself to receive minute changes in nature around:

> "A syncopation of birdsong stung across the sky, a tickle of childish laughter slipping under fences a rustle of bugs in roots hedge in thistle and stum,

> a sweep of bruised aubretia spreading over walls,

A steal of magpies in copper crown lording over its bounty."
(A Breath and Beauty)

The loneliness in lockdown offers the poet an opportunity to look within, introspect and open her eyes to an entirely new and hitherto hidden beauty of nature. She sums up her ecstasy in the last stanza:

"My lungs expand, drink in a breath of beauty, exhale." (A Breath of Beauty)

It is hard to resist the temptation to enjoy showers, to get drenched in rain; but alas! The lockdown has deprived the senses of every joy the seasons offer tirelessly year after year. Like a 'mighty sage' the sky is blessing the earth and the Nature is 'all set to party' but we, the humans are caged! Indeed, during the lockdown we read the stories of how air got cleaner and curious animals walked the streets: how rare birds flew fearlessly and green carpet of grass

covered untrodden land. *Nayan Phukan's* short untitled poetic piece published in 'Coronasutra' vividly describes the plight of caged humans as opposed to sudden and unexpected freedom discovered by Nature during lockdown.

"My heart screams to get drenched in the magical rain, But here I am stuck by my window inhaling the petrichor smell. The cosmos is dancing in joy as monsoon has the sky like a mighty sage and nature is all set to party like never before

and nature is all set to party like never before, as this time humans are caged."

(Untitled, coronasutra, Nayan Phukan. TOI)

Not all accepted this forced lockdown with open hands. The rebels would never surrender. They did not want to 'rust unburnished', so they decided to 'shine in use' like Ulysses.

Ana Claudia Antunes belongs to this category of fearless humans who listen to the heart, ignoring rational minds and the fear of death. In her short poem published in 'Coronasutra' she refuses to get imprisoned at home, reading books to pass the time or longing hopelessly for freedom like Rapunzel. The poem reflects her desperation to set herself free not just from the trap but also from the fear of death:

"Trying to play my past and stay home, Burying my nose in a book like a gnome, But I know how Rapunzel felt in a tower when she wanted to feel the rain shower... It's like being in your forties out of a fort when your forte is dancing barefoot..."

So, she decided to cut the chains and go free.....without caring for danger of disease and death lurking outside. Her courageous heart declares bold decision:

"Instead of being trapped I chose to cut short, To leave the port,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

And not to go kaput."
(Untitled, Coronasutra, Aug 2020)

**Oz Hardwick's 'Appointment'** is more realistic in its portrayal of the feelings of a majority of humans' ability to overcome any calamity. The shock was sudden and rude. The first reaction was of denial, then acceptance followed by resignation. No good news coming from any quarters to cheer up. Only a monotonous routine and bleak future staring in face. The dates and days lost their significance. The monotony and dejection is evident in the opening line:

"We've stopped counting days, instead considering everything one-

a beginning, an ending, a certainty without surprises a single candle on a pink birthday cake." (Appointment, Coronasutra, TOI, Aug 6, 2020)

Life had never been so colourless. Nothing was happening around. No food newspapers and televisions except the ugly figures of the affected and the dead surging day by day the world over. Work from Home and Zoom meetings failed to bring in any cheer in the frozen life. The second stanza of the poem gives voice to feelings of emptiness felt by one and all during our lockdown-days. The tone reminds us of T.S Eliot's Waste Land. He writes:

"The same sporting fixtures break up the repetitive news, and the weather forecast could be anything since nobody goes out.

We've even stopped naming days, an informal today acting as shorthand for occasional meals, an empty diary, a Zoom meeting with the signal breaking up, the cat coming and going as if he owns the world-

which he does since we gave it up.

The fear of death, the urge to live, the suffering of the dying, the outcast dead....pushed one and all again and again inside the

confinement, shattering false notion of supremacy of the human race. The last stanza records this sense of helplessness:

"Naturally, we've stopped living in days, focusing instead on our movement between rooms, the distinctions between contesting apps, irregular monitoring of heart rate and oxygen levels, the measureless sustain on my old electric guitar, the number of tea bags in commemorative tins, and the comforting silence of all the telephones we have ever cradled like injured birds."

(Appointment, Coronasutra, ToI)

Not everyone was dejected and depressed during the lockdown. A few brave-hearts like ten years old *Maurice* were strong enough to advise us all to 'stand together' and face the situation boldly in her poem 'Stand Together'. It is really heartening to see the optimism of a ten year old representative of all children who unfortunately are learning to cope up with the pandemic which they have come across so early in their life. In her not so lofty poem she offers her mature advice in innocent words:

"Share your kindness and your love, It's no time to be mean, push and shove, Hold on to your loved ones, hold them tight, Listen to the rules and do what's right." (Stand Together, Coronasutra, ToI, Sept 8, 2020)

Caught up in the repeated cycle of lockdown due to our irresponsible behaviours, the children are the worst sufferers. For them *Maurice* has very practical advice. She writes:

"Spend the precious time with your family, Read, do puzzles, play games and be silly, Watch TV, snuggle up on the sofa, As mummy no longer needs to be chauffeur." (Stand Together, Coronasutra, ToI)

She further advises to enjoy 'all the little things' but underlines the necessity to follow the rules in the words-'Stay safe, be brave, we shall not fall'

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

#### **Conclusion:**

JBS Haldane in his essay 'The Scientific Point of View' mentions that the real enemies of man are the viruses. The pandemics striking every century with regularity have underlined this fact. It is the pandemic COVID-19 which has left life paralysed once again.

With the arrival of vaccines, the ray of hope is in sight. Fears are alleviated to a great extent. The instances of emotional outbursts in the form of literary expressions are getting rarer. The wounds of depression, suicides, deaths, joblessness, uncertainty of the future are yet to heal completely. They would certainly find expressions in the various forms of literature in the near future.

Scientific fraternity will continue discussing what went wrong and how. Humanity may or may not learn the lessons. But for the time being we are caught in the chain of lockdowns. In the words of *Abhik Roy*, "As we are confined within four walls of our homes under lockdown in the wake of COVID-19, literature helps break the barriers, connecting us across different historical periods, and time zones with others who have experienced similar tragedies." (*The Statesman, July 31, 2020*)

Thinking on the same lines- it could very well be said that the above mentioned poems, though coming from distant lands and different places have a lot in common. They encourage us to appreciate the fact that we are not the only ones who are dealing with the worldwide devastation wrought by the pandemic. As we identify ourselves with their loneliness, longings, hope and despair, we also feel motivated and strong by their optimism and faith in human strength. As a sincere expression of the feelings of ordinary people, these poems become a source of consolation for those who wish to see this pandemic getting diminished to the endemic.

#### **Works Cited**

- Abhik Roy, www.thestatesman.com, 'Literature and **Pandemic**' - 31 July 2020. Net.
- A.C. Clerk, *In Lockdown*, *Coronasutra*, The Times of India, Aug. 4, 2020, print.
- Ana Claudia Antunes, *Untitled poem*, *Coronasutra*, The Times of India, Aug. 8, 2020, print.
- Anonymous, Empty Street, Coronasutra, The Times of India, Aug. 5, 2020, print
- Avijeet Das, *Untitled poem*, *Coronasutra*, The Times of India, Aug. 2, 2020, print.
- Kate Young, A Breath of Beauty, Coronasutra, The Times of India, Aug. 7, 2020, print.
- Maurice, Stand Together, Coronasutra, The Times of India, Sept. 8, 2020, print.
- Nayan Phukan, *Untitled poem*, *Coronasutra*, The Times of India, Sept. 15, 2020, print.
- Oz Hardwick, Appointment, Coronasutra, The Times of India, Aug. 6, 2020, print.
- Stephen Lloyd Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2003, print.

Dr. Poorva Bhonde Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Sharadchandra College, Butibori,

Nagpur.

## Surviving Catastrophe in Jose Saramago's *Blindness* and Emily Mandel's *Station Eleven*

#### Priya Wanjari

#### Abstract

Throughout history, humankind has encountered many epidemics. These outbreaks that embolden people to question themselves, and the civilization they have established. The periods of pandemic, which depicts the adaptation of mankind to new conditions, his demeanor towards the epidemic, also reveals the fear, vulnerability, sacrifice, opportunism, and new treatment regimen of man. In this sense, it is possible to mention the works in which the pandemic processes are subject in the realm of literature. In particular, it is endorsed that novel art comes to the fore in this context. In Jose Saramago's 'Blindness' and Emily Mandel's 'Station Eleven', the perspective is concentrated on the backlash of the pandemic trial on the human. The paper intends to examine the relationship between human illness and social decline in pandemic periods. In the context of the relationship between human and malady in the two works mentioned, it is aimed to analyze the origin and catastrophes that appeared in the pandemic process. Fear and social decline during pandemic are reasoned in both the novels.

**Keywords** Pandemic, fear, disease, social decline, humanity.

#### Introduction

"We are fortunate to have many horrific futures to choose from in our literature."

(Robin A. Bedenbaugh, 13)

The spread of the COVID-19 disease has had unprecedented effects on economic and social activity around the world. At the start of the pandemic and the consequent lockdown, the penmanship was affected quite profoundly. The fair amount of anxiety brought by the advent of the disease provided pandemic-themed reading lists to the readers worldwide. Though this theme is considered as modern one, epidemics have equipped themes to literature since literature's very invention. As Argha kumar Benerji remarked in his article *Whose Afraid of Virus Wolf?* He stated that:

"The human tryst with epidemic is as old as the hills; writers over centuries have repeatedly explored it in prose and verse, underlining not just its terrifying power but also the resilience of the human mind in confronting it." (Banerji, The Hindu, 2020)

The decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio in the late 1340sdiscussed bubonic plague and the quarantine time spent by people to avoid the 'Black Death'. Ling Ma's darkly satirical Severance (2018) also makes a strong showing: Electric Literature describes it as 'a pandemic-zombie-dystopian-novel, but it's also a relatable millennial coming-of-age story and an intelligent critique of exploitative capitalism, mindless consumerism, and the drudgery of bullshit jobs.' There's John M. Barry's the Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic(2005) in history, 'a tale of triumph amid tragedy, which provides us with a precise and sobering model as we confront the epidemics looming on our own horizon.'

Like all human experience, disease has been portrayed in literature and other art forms. In an article, 'Plague Writing: From Boccaccio to Camus', David Steel says that as disease involves physical and emotional suffering; it is expected to cut more keenly that other aspects into an artist's sensibility. The turn to literature and other creative expressions defines one of the coping mechanisms in the face of such pandemics. During challenging times of disease and quarantine, exacerbated by anxiety about physical and psychological health and economic hardship,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

literature has been a faithful companion. Writers recreate the fear, feeling of uncertainty faced by large section of people. They also demonstrate how love, solidarity and the dedication amidst the loss of life can resist the spread of Pandemic. A literary text therefore is the examination of human condition and metaphorical representation of Pandemic.

COVID-19 has heightened human suffering, undermined the economy, turned the lives of billions of people around the globe upside down, and significantly affected the health, economic, environmental and social domains. The current COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures are an extreme stressor that might result in negative emotional experiences and feelings of loneliness. Similar glimpses of emotions and unrest are seen in the novels of Pandemic crises as their theme, *Blindness* by Jose Saramago and *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel. The novelists try to weave together characters' perspectives from across the planet and over several decades to explore how humanity can fall apart and then, somehow, come back together.

#### Fear

A pandemic is an epidemic that occurs all over the world, beyond international boundaries, and affects a very large number of people. The Latin word 'plaga', means 'stroke' or 'wound', the Greek 'plaga' means 'strike' or 'blow'. In pandemic literature, disease replaces the conventional villains like dragons, ogres, terrorists, aliens as the dreaded foe that casts a shroud of death and needs to be vanquished. It is an insidious enemy — an invisible virus or bacterium. Diseases like plague, smallpox, influenza and cholera ruin families destroy towns and leave generation scarred and scared. The devastation caused by outbreak impacted many major writers. Pandemic literature is usually supported by facts, data, and symbolism. To rationalize the death of the good and innocent as well as that of the sinners, the proposition expanded to believe that a degenerate society was being purged and cleansed of theevil through disease and death. In *The Plague*, the disease seems an

embodiment of all that layrotting in the inner space — physical and mental. "It was as if the earth on which our houses stood were being purged of its secreted humors; thrusting up to the surface the abscesses and pus-clotsthat had been forming in its entrails" (Camus and Buss 16).Pandemic literature became anallegory to criticize evils in society. This was an idea of expiation and atonement of individuals in through collective suffering.

A pandemic situation is a type of emergency which has socioeconomic and psychological ramifications. It creates fear and anxiety among society members. Fear is a common psychological outcome of any type of danger, but when it is related with stress and phobia, it can create strong signals of response. This is what occurs during emergencies like pandemics. Unforeseen reality, uncertainties, loss of faith in health infrastructure is the factors which cause interference in routine life and leads people to sense of fear. Fear is one of the most powerful emotions. It has strong impact on mind and body. It is a natural response to unexpected and sudden change. It may be visible through psychological indications like worry and palpitation, or provoke cognitive sadness or anger. People may change their behavior and avoid public places. The motif of fear due to sudden change is used by Saramago in his Blindness.

Jose Saramago is a Portuguese novelist, essayist, poet and dramatist noted for his moralism, post-modem techniques, and apocalyptic fables. He has combined myths, the history of his own country and surrealistic imagination in his works. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998, after the publication of his novel *Blindness*. Saramago has written and published in every literary genre: essay, poetry, novel, short story, drama. There are altogether more than thirty books written by Saramago. His works are translated into forty languages and are widely read all over the world.

The novel 'Blindness' chronicles an unprecedented epidemic of blindness that sweeps across an unnamed country. It

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

opens with one man at a traffic stop, his world suddenly enveloped in a milky whiteness. He is taken to an ophthalmologist's office where, after walking through a busy waiting room, he leaves the whole clinic, including the doctor, infected. The group is quarantined in an old asylum by the ministry of health. The doctor and his wife, who miraculously maintains her sight, are sequestered there as well. In many of Saramago's novels proper names of the personages are absent. In his novel *Blindness*, Saramago names no personages. They are only referred to as 'the first blind man,' 'the doctor,' or 'the girl with dark glasses,' allowing us to fill in the spaces. This narrative feature of the author strengthens the universality of the subject: without proper names, the personages are universalized, that is, all enclose the human universe, all the people, all the names.

Saramago weaves the story as a master of storytelling. The readers are free to view it as an allegory or a work of astonishing imagination. Saramago uses a quotation from the Book of Exhortations as the epigram to Blindness: "If you can see, look. If you can look, observe". Near the end of the novel, when the blind people are getting their vision back, he has one of his characters remark: "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see" (292). These two quotations indicate the freedom given to the reader for interpretation.

Inside the asylum, panic spreads "faster than the legs that carry it". The doctor's wife quickly learns how fear and the feeling of being unseen and therefore unjudged for your actions—can lead to moral depravity as she and others are subjected to rape, extortion, and murder by fellow ward mates. Finally, when the entire city turns blind and the quarantined group emerges, they find their city in ruins. Wandering the abandoned streets, they find themselves in a church where holy statues have their eyes covered in white cloth and paintings have their eyes obscured by white paint. This is a world that appears forever changed. In that world, even the saints did not

deserve to see amid the suffering of the blind. Then, as quickly as it came, the blindness recedes. The world buzzes with optimism, as if awakened from a nightmare. But the doctor's wife, who saw the realities inside the asylum walls and fears that the suffering will have been in vain. The people of her city, she knows, will soon forget, even as she cannot. That is her sacrifice: to witness the horrors others could ignore and to serve as the historical record for what really happened behind the asylum walls. She learns the paradox of this epidemic of blindness is that it illuminated more than it obscured. As the doctor's wife reflects: "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see." The citizens of the city chose to not see the cruelty hiding under the surface in themselves and in others. It took an epidemic to shed a blinding light on the darkness that was always beneath.

Station Eleven, Emily St John Mandel's award-winning novel, restores the possibility of authenticity in a popular literary trend by creatively tangling various media in its narrative. Following the trajectory of a peripatetic group of artists, the novel delineates the world in the aftermath of a flu pandemic. In this world, humanity is virtually eradicated. Due to the post-apocalyptic setting, the reader can ponder over perdurable anxieties of existence and survival. The novel begins with the death of a famous actor amidst the performance of King Lear. Within a few hours, the lethal flu has already struck and its rampant spread wipes out nearly all human beings. Against the backdrop of the catastrophe, the novel brings into the fore the lives of the few survivors. There are two main storylines threaded in the narrative. The one refers to the world prior to the havoc and focuses on the life of the famous actor, Arthur. The other describes the world after the apocalypse and has as its focal point a troupe of actors and musicians, namely The Travelling Symphony. As Station Eleven unravels, correlations are established between the two narrative plots through continual flashback narrations.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

The vast majority of the novel takes place before and after the outbreak. The medical details of the disease are less important than the rhetorical impact of the destructive virus. Those fears in Station Eleven coalesce in scenes where communities must shift how they understand their relationship to one another. Characters stranded in an airport hangar, for example, must work together to build a new society that accommodates their shared traumatic experience. The pandemic in Mandel's novel dramatically emphasizes to the characters not how to respond to a virus but, instead, how powerfully interconnected they truly are. Part of what pandemic fiction illuminates is how fears of invasion and the perceived threat of outsiders can diminish our humanity. One of the protagonists, Jeevan, describes the threatening ambience in Toronto where anarchy reigns. The liberty that citizens suddenly acquire is quite treacherous and creates an atmosphere of precarity since anyone can rob, inflict pain or even kill his fellow man. Therefore, borderless society equates lawless society. The threat that other infected people create becomes a perpetual anxiety. This state of contingency is not limited to Toronto though. Kirsten, a member of the wandering troupe concedes that she was forced to kill in order to survive in the States.

Despite the novel's initial setting in Toronto, the action is gradually transferred in nameless places since nations no longer exist. Characters scarcely ever explicitly mention the locations according to their current names such as New York or New Jersey. In case they do, the only purpose is to facilitate the reader. For instance, they refer to the former Virginia state so as to give quasi-precise coordinates of their journey. The nameless venues gesture towards a transnational message. This globalized ambience is primarily generated when the geographical borders are eradicated.

#### Social Decline

Both the chosen novels depict the theme of societal decline during pandemic. In Saramago's fiction, the blind man's condition is like cattle and animals. They don't see anything. The animals see everything but they can't express it. The blind group is ready on the pavement. They made rows. They have to be careful from some aggressive group on the way. They may get lost if they break the line. They put their arms on other's shoulders and start moving. The group is two blocks away from the house where the old man with the black eye patch lived. The streets are full of blind people who are in search of food. The novelist says that experience is the teacher. Previously animal shunt and defend in groups. Now the Portuguese people have to defend in groups. "Experience is truly the mistress of life, even these animals, previously domesticated, learned to mistrust caresses, they now hunt in packs and in packs they defend themselves from being hunted down, and since, thanks be to God, they still have eyes, they are better equipped to avoid danger, and to attack if necessary." (*Blindness*,247)

The doctor's wife makes calculations of the food she still has in reserve. She can have the food at home. She can go to the underground store of the super market to have more food. At the square, the dogs eat a man's corpse. They try to tear the flesh caught between their teeth. The doctor's wife vomits looking at that scene of dogs. The man with the black eye patch told about the people turning blind on those streets. There is no water to drink. The doctor's wife remembers that her bathroom water tub always 1ms five liters of water. She goes to bathroom and brought water. She gives that water to the boy and the group. Everybody eats. In the late evening it began to rain. There is fierce wind. The doctor's wife gets up and goes to the balcony. She sees it rained heavily. She wants to take the advantage of rain. She goes to kitchen and brings bowls, vessels, and buckets and collects water. She washes the clothes.

Jose Saramago's novel *Blindness* effectively ushers the reader into catastrophic atmosphere. As, one by one, people in the novel go blind; we get the sense that humanity is being punished. Saramago follows the disintegration of civilization toward a "natural state," in which people lose their humanity. The reason for the rapidly spreading blindness is not clear, yet it is difficult not to

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

attribute it to humanity's degraded moral state. The doctor's wife, the novel's protagonist, chooses to pretend to be blind and follows her husband into a quarantine installation. There, she becomes the leader of a group of blind people, because she feels "the responsibility of having my eyesight when others have lost their" (252). Through the metaphor of sight, Saramago calls upon us to look at things honestly and critically, even when we feel like the doctor's wife: "If only you could see what I am obliged to see, you would want to be blind" (133).

Saramago doesn't think that people are inherently benevolent and that society is inevitably good for them, nor that people are naturally wicked and can only ever hope to protect themselves from harm. Rather, he sees human beings and societies as having unlimited *capacities* for both benevolence and wickedness: people can integrate their interests with other people's or reject others' humanity, depending on the circumstances and social pressures that shape their moral conscience.

The title of Station Eleven is taken from a comic book series that Arthur's wife, Miranda created. The comic book is an integral part of the narrative since it anchors the entire action and conduces to the formation of networks among the protagonists. Concrete parts of it are also integrated in the novel. Aside from the comic, there is an assemblage of various media and artifacts that partake in the realm of culture. Station Eleven outlines very convincingly the condition of a world that crumbles. At the outset, the non-existence of borders dissolves the boundaries of law and structured society. One of the protagonists, Jeevan, describes the threatening ambience in Toronto where anarchy reigns. The liberty that citizens suddenly acquire is quite treacherous and creates an atmosphere of precarity since anyone can rob, inflict pain or even kill his fellow man. Therefore, borderless society equates lawless society. The threat that other infected people create becomes a perpetual anxiety. This state of contingency is not limited to Toronto though. Kirsten, a member of the wandering troupe concedes that she was forced to kill in order to survive in the States.

In Station Eleventhe novelist tries to make objects beautiful by temporarily detaching them from form. In the same waythat the aesthetic operation of the museum renders things beautiful, the novelitself, which like the museum is organized around a situation of massive loss, constellates the human life form and sociocultural forms of life in a way that makes things beautiful. That the museum serves as a figure for the novel's own aesthetic program is most apparent in occasional litanies of "what was lost in the collapse: almost everything, almost everyone, but there is still such beauty" (57). The cultivation of beauty chimes in with the novel's refrain: "Because survivalis insufficient" (58) which goes together with the unstated premise that, if survival is not sufficient, then nearextinction is yet necessary for the production of beauty. The novel repeatedly insists that those who remember everything suffer most (267). "Survival is a baseline, and to truly live, one must find the things in life that make you fight to survive." This enabling knowledge is, of course, also that of the reader, who has access to both the world before and the one after the collapse. However, the novel ends on a positive note. The novel's optimistic message is encapsulated in this sentence: "in the distance, pin pricks of light arranged into a grid. There, plainly visible on the side of a hill some miles distant: a town, or a village, whose streets were lit up with electricity." The novel provides a refreshing outlook in all aspects of humanity, art and the creative potential in writing.

#### Conclusion

Pandemics scare us partly because they transform fears about globalization, cultural change, and community identity into tangible threats. Representations of contagious diseases allow authors and readers the opportunity to explore the non-medical dimensions of the fears associated with contagious disease. Pandemic fiction does not offer readers a prophetic look into the future, regardless of what some may think. Instead, narratives about contagious disease hold up a mirror to our deepest, most inchoate fears about our present moment and explore different

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

possible responses to those fears. A pandemic can never be a personal tragedy. Rather it is a catastrophe of an unprecedented scale that gripped the lives and actions of entire humanity. It would be no leap of the imagination to state that in writing novels based on apocalyptic situation, Saramago and Mandelhave helped the readers to get insight, who themselves felt clueless, terrified and helpless in the wake of a disease that had the power to snatch from them their loved ones.

#### **Works Cited**

- Saramago Jose, Giovanni Pontiero, *Blindness*, London, Vintage Books, 2005. Print.
- Mandel, Emily St. John Station Eleven, Chicago. 2014. Print.
- From the Remains: Reflections on "Station Eleven," Robin A. Bedenbaugh, ed. Knoxville, TN: Newfound Press (2018). p.no. 13, brooks clark 'What will I do in the coming dystopia?'
- (Benerji, Argha kumar. "Who's Afraid of Virus Wolf?" The Hindu, 26 March, 2020, www.thehindu.com/books/whos-afraid-of-a-virus-wolf/article31172069.ece Accessed on 20-5-202)
- Camus Albert and Buss Robert, *The Modern Classics Plague*, Paperback, 2013. Print.

**Dr. Priya D. Wanjari** Principal and Head of English Dept. Santaji Mahavidayalaya, Nagpur.

# A Life Misspent – A Recollection on Influenza Epidemics of 1918-19

#### **Urmila Dabir**

#### **Abstract**

The outbreak of pandemic in any period of any nation has touched the sensibilities of artists and litterateurs and it has resulted to 'pandemic literature'. Suryakant Tripathi has penned a memoir *Kulli Bhat* written by him in Hindi in 1938. *Kulli Bhat* has been translated into English by Satti Khanna in 2016. The memoir is a stunning confrontation of two social taboos — the caste system and homosexuality and is also a record on the making of one of the greatest poets of all time along with the recollection on influenza epidemics of 1918-19. Tripathi lost his family members, his wife, his daughter and his uncle and many more members to the epidemics. This shattered him to the extent that he suffered from schizophrenia later in his life and succumbed to the disease in 1961.

Keywords: Pandemics, influenza, epidemics, poverty, misery

All the countries of the world are trying to contain the spread of covid-19 since the time it was declared a pandemic by WHO (World Health Organization) in 2020. The epidemics and pandemics have affected the nations in various ways worldwide before covid-19 pandemic. The life of common men is shattered with the outbreak of epidemics and pandemics with the loss of life, jobs snatched, material losses resulting in emotional instability of people and fall of nations at large. And history has proved the

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

outbreak of pandemic in any period of any nation has touched the sensibilities of artists and litterateurs and it has resulted to 'pandemic literature'. Many foreign and Indian writers have expressed their observations and experiences on these epidemics and pandemics.

Suryakant Tripathi has penned a memoir *Kulli Bhat* written by him in Hindi in 1938. Suryakant Tripathi, famous by his pen name Nirala, was an Indian poet, novelist, essayist and story writer; and pioneer of the Chhayavaad (Neo-Romantic) movement of Hindi Literature. He was conferred with the title 'Mahapraan'. Like his pen name 'Nirala' which means 'unique' his writings were also unique. In his literary journey he has experimented with different genres and themes. Ram ki Shakti Puja, Saroj Smriti, Parimal, Anaamika, Todti Patthar are some of notable poems of Tripathi. Chhaturi Chamar, Sukul Ki Biwi, Sakhi, Lily and Devi are his collections of short stories. Prabandha-Parichaya, Ravidra-Kavita-Kannan, Chabuk are his collection of essays. Kulli Bhat and Billesur Bakriha are his notable works of prose. His works have been translated into English for wider spectrum of readers by scholars David Rubin and Satti Khanna. Kulli Bhat has been translated into English by Satti Khanna in 2016. The translation work of Satti Khanna bears the title, A Life Misspent. Satti Khanna has a passion for translation. He is an associate professor at Duke University, United States. He teaches Indian Cinema and Modern Hindi Literature there.

A Life Misspent is a chronicle on the life of Suryakant Tripathi. Tripathi's entire life was troubled one. He was born in 1896 in an orthodox Brahmin Family living in the Midnapore district of Bengal. His parents originally belonged to Unnao region of Uttar Pradesh. His father was a government servant and his earnings were insufficient for the existence of the entire family. Moreover his father was a strict man who wanted to control the entire family. And Suryakant Tripathi was a person who loved

freedom since his childhood and couldn't bear restrictions which had no logical reasoning. Therefore, Tripathi's childhood years were the days when he experienced poverty and understood the life in poverty well. His schooling was from Bengali medium school. But he was more interested in Sanskrit language and therefore read books in Sanskrit. He also read books in Hindi and English language as well. At an early age Tripathi lost his mother and he had to face his tyrannical father all alone.

After matriculation Tripathi had to study at home because his father did not allow for his further education. But Tripathi's interest in studying literature remained and he continued with his reading. After few years he shifted from Bengal to his forefathers' native place, Gadhakola village of Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh to continue with his studies and work.

When Tripathi was in his teens he was married to Manohara Devi of Dalmau. Her age at the time of marriage was only thirteen years. Tripathi and his father brought the bride to their home in the village. At that time plague was raging in their village. The villagers abandoned their house and were living in the orchards in temporary constructed huts. Tripathi's father too had constructed two huts under a mahua tree in their orchards before leaving for Dalmau. So when they returned from Dalmau they too lived in those huts. After passing of five days Manohara Devi's father came to Tripathi's village to take his daughter back to Dalmau for ceremonial return. Tripathi's father-in-law did not drink water from the wells of their village because of the plague and he also insisted upon returning back to Dalmau the same day. Manohara Devi's father was worried for his daughter being infected with plague so he took these decisions. This offended Tripathi's father. He threatened Manohara Devi's father with the words, "Weren't you worried about my son being exposed? If this is how much you care, we can find a new bride for our son" (Tripathi, 12). Though Manohara Devi's father returned for Dalmau along with his daughter, but the following day he sent

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

for a messenger to the house of Tripathi to fetch their bride back. Tripathi went to the village of Manohara Devi with a servant to bring her back to his house.

Tripathi could only spend some years with his wife and these years were the liveliest and happy years of his life, as Manohara Devi passed due to the influenza epidemic. Tripathi's daughter too died of the influenza. Tripathi was left alone in his life. He lost more members of his family and near ones to the epidemic; notable mention can be of his elder brother, elder brother's wife and their young son of fifteen years, and his uncle. About the loss of these many family members Tripathi had mentioned in A Life Misspent that it was the strangest phase of his life when his family disappeared in the blink of an eye and that his life was filled with darkness. He has also mentioned in the book, "I was standing on the banks of the Ganges in Dalmau. As far as could be seen, only human bodies were seen in the Ganges water." The Sanitary Commissioner's Report for 1918 also noted that all rivers across India were clogged up with dead bodies, (Kapoor) because of a shortage of firewood for cremation (Mills). Tripathi could not get proper job that could help him sustain his life. Therefore he had to live in poverty throughout his life. Tripathi went through an emotional and financial crisis after the loss of his family members. He got himself into the job of editor and proof reader for several publishers in Uttar Pradesh and other states as well. Along with that he continued with writing essays, poems and novels in Hindi. He was strongly against any exploitation in society and rebelled to the injustice. This resulted in troubled acceptance from the society and he had to face ridicule and derision.

All these men, women and children of his family and of other families of neighbourhood succumbed to the Influenza that spread worldwide after the First World War in 1918-19. In the month of May in 1918 the Bombay ports were busy with the back and forth of troops and goods from England as the First World War was

almost over. These ships have also brought with them the H1N1 influenza virus. The Bombay city was soon in the grip of this influenza and then gradually the virus spread to the entire country through railway lines. It was estimated that eighteen million casualties were registered and it accounted to six percent of the country's population then. The influenza pandemics had waves of engulfing the world. The first wave was mild but the second was more lethal. The disease gradually vanished by March 1920. The present covid-19 pandemic too is virus born disease and the nation is again witnessing waves of the pandemic with the second wave more dangerous as compared to the first one.

About the autobiographical element in *Kulli Bhaat*, Suryakant Tripathi himself has mentioned in the *Preface* of the book.

It also happens to provide an account of my life, more openly perhaps than the orthodox would like. But genuine literary people enjoy novelty. They may forgive the inclusion of autobiography in my tale if the telling has quality (Tripathi, *Preface*).

His circumstances and the early tragic losses of his mother, wife and daughter led to a mental breakdown — it is believed that he turned schizophrenic and succumbed to the disease in 1961.

The story of *A Life Misspent* is set in pre-independence India. When Tripathi went to Dalmau to fetch his bride, there he meets a strange man called Kulli Bhat who claims descent from a family of bards and, despite his mother-in-law's reservations about Kulli's sexuality, Tripathi finds himself drawn to Kulli. Tripathi seeks employment in various places but finds himself unable to stay away from Dalmau for long. Bhat was unashamed of his attraction to Tripathi, and later went on to marry a Muslim woman. As a Dalit, Kulli Bhat was an embodiment of the perfect social recluse for an intolerant society because he was unafraid of his attraction to other man and married a Muslim woman. Bhat struggled for acceptance

in society, very much like Tripathi in the world of literature. The character of Bhat inspired Tripathi deeply. Tripathi's fascination with this man made their interactions even more forbidden, since the entire village was already suspicious of Kulli Bhat's sexuality. Tripathi rejected Kulli's sexual advances but maintained their friendship, and supported Bhat until the end – and even beyond the end. He performed Bhat's last rites when the Brahmin priests refused to do so.

A Life Misspent is as much the account of an unlikely friendship as it is a coming-of-age story. The memoir is a stunning confrontation of two social taboos — the caste system and homosexuality and is also a record on the making of one of the greatest poets of all time along with the recollection on influenza epidemics of 1918-19.

#### **Works Cited:**

- Gupta, Mohini. *Review: Why we must read 'Nirala'*. The Wire, uploaded on 14 May 2016, thewire.in/books/review-whywe-must-read-nirala, accessed on 25 March 2021.
- Kapoor, Amit. *An Unwanted Shipment: The Indian Experience of* the 1918 Spanish Flu. The Economic Times, 3 April 2020, economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/an-unwanted-shipment-the-indian-experience-of-the-1918-spanish-flu/articleshow/, accessed on 7 April 2021.
- Mills, I. D. *The 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic The Indian Experience*. The Indian Economic & social History Review, Volume 23, Issue 1, pages 1–40, published on 1 march 1986, journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00194646860230010 2, accessed on 3 March 2021.
- Tripathi, Suryakant. *A Life Misspent*. Translated from the Hindi by Satti Khanna. Harper Perennial Publishers India (2016).

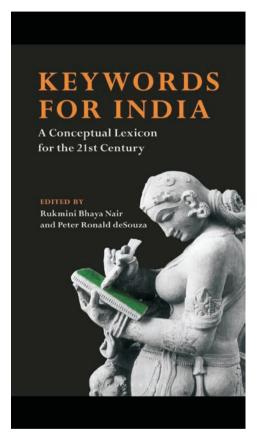
Reddiar, Mahesh. Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' — Biography. Philaindia.info, uploaded on 8 December 2011 and last updated on 17 July 2017, philaindia.info/suryakant-tripathi-nirala-biography/, accessed on 25 March 2021.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Suryakant Tripathi.

 $https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suryakant\_Tripathi, accessed on 16\,March 2021.$ 

**Dr. Urmila Dabir**Principal & Head Deptt. of English,
Rajkumar Kewalramani Kanya Mahavidyalaya,
Jaripatka, Nagpur

## **Book Reviews**



Keywords for India – Apprehending the Elusive!

### Supantha Bhattacharyya

[Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Rukmini Bhaya Nayar & Peter Ronald deSouza (Eds). Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pages: 831, Kindle Edition Price: Rs.1711.]

In her introduction to this timely and riveting compilation, Prof. Bhaya Nair (Professor of Linguistics and English Emerita at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, India) writes, "How, then, do societies reorient? How do they use the habitus of the familiar to engage with the unknown in times of unusual social perturbation? In this volume, we ask this question with respect to India, a civilization space distinguished by its diehard pluralisms as well as its mnemonic continuities of language, culture, religion and belief. Nothing in India is ever conceptually singular and, by the same paradoxical token, all concepts are remarkably singular." In this very significant work, the editors have literally attempted to see infinity in a grain of sand by including 250+ essays by diverse experts on the major terms that contribute to the process of signification in India today.

This bewildering assortment of terms has been sorted out in this collection under seven broad categories: i) Classical Heritages: Databases of Memory, ii) Contemporary Aesthetic Modes: Reimaginings, iii) Economic Mantras: Media and Technological Change, iv) Intimacies: Culture and Material Culture, v) Emancipatory Imaginaries, vi) Language and Self-reflection and vii) Politics and the Political. These broad areas contain hundreds of buzzwords which are controversial, emotionally-charged, often ribtickling and yet, curiosly, always paradigmatic – rest easy, Saussure;).

A brief, random cross-section in the alphabetical order should be enough to whet the reader's appetite — Aadhar, Adda, Ahimsa, Asmita, Azan, Beauty Parlour, Bhadralok, Bollywood, Breaking News, Chappal, Cyberbhakt, Dalit, Dowry, Dharma, Dharna, Digital India, Female Foeticide, Godrej Almirah, Gorapan, Haj, Haram/Halal, Hijra, Jugaad, Love Marriage, Mohalla, Ishq, Itihasa, Jharoo, Jootha, Kama and Kamasutra, Kolaveri, Mai-Baap Sarkar, Mall, Nakhra, Nasbandi, Padma Awards, Parsi, Saree, Selfie, Sogadu, Susegad, South Indian Films, Thalaivar, Timepass, RTI, Vastu, Vote Bank, VIP, Zero — words which roil around us, become embedded in our subconscious, are used almost reflexively, and also, in the final reckoning, characterise us.

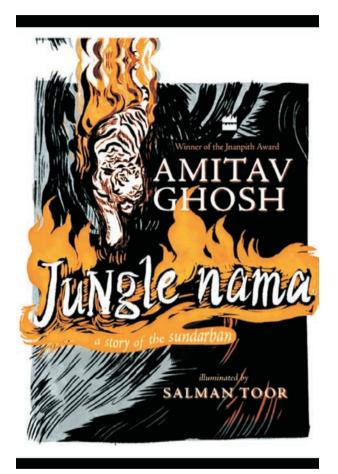
As Prof. Nayar acknowledges, Raymond Williams' iconic

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976) was the model for this book, which itself was written in response to a realization by the celebrated Marxist critic that he had been witness to a transformative break in hitherto familiar cognitive habits. The editors are confirmed in their opinion that the world is facing a similar break in the second decade of the 21st Century. Another very interesting feature of the work is that it includes many terms from the South Indian cultures and linguistic communities – though the North Indian bias has not quite been eradicated – in a conscious effort to attempt to flatten the knowledge asymmetries between the two regions.

In a pandemic-ridden world, when the twenty first century globizen is witness to shifting memory patterns, a reconfigured reality, unpredictably mutating languages and a revolutionary transformation in attitudes and beliefs due to offline/online manipulative and persuasive strategies, an all-inclusive book such as this would certainly prove highly effective in restructuring the thought processes and reaffirming the beliefs of the average Indian —at least the ones who read!

**Dr. Supantha Bhattacharyya** Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Hislop College, Nagpur.



### Ghosh! for better or verse!

Supantha Bhattacharyya

[Jungle Nama: A Story of the Sunderban. Amitav Ghosh & Salman Toor. Fourth Estate India, 2021. Pages: 88, Kindle

Price: Rs. 265]

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Jungle Nama is Amitav Ghosh's verse adaptation of an episode from the legend of Bon Bibi, a folktale from the Sundarban deltas which form the backdrop of two of his earlier novels — the epic *The Hungry Tide* and the somewhat disappointing *Gun Island*. It is the story of the insatiably rich merchant Dhona, the poor village boy Dukhey, and his mother; it is also the story of Dokkhin Rai, a mighty spirit who appears to humans as a tiger, of Bon Bibi, the benign goddess of the forest, and her warrior brother Shah Jongoli. The original print version of this legend, dating back to the nineteenth century, is composed in a Bengali verse meter known as *dwipodipayar* (the *payar* cadence, which is the principal metre of medieval Bangla literature, is a variation of the *aksharvritta* with 8/6 syllables). *Jungle Nama* is a liberal adaptation of this myth, told entirely in a *payar*-like meter of twenty-four syllable couplets that replicate the cadence of the original.

Ghosh neatly offers an elucidation in the text itself: "But when you call Bon Bibi, you must do it right, / or your words won't carry, you must help them take flight. / Be sure to cast your call in *dwipodipoyar*, / it'll give your voice wings, it's the meter of wonder; / its cadence will strengthen your words; they'll gain in power; / it'll work its magic by tying your thoughts together; / into couplets of twenty-four syllables, / that sometimes rhyme, and sometimes use half- rhymed vocables. / Compose them well, and your lines will reach Bon Bibi, / if there's enough faith in your heart, she'll come, you'll see."

The first-ever book in verse by Amitav Ghosh, *Jungle Nama* suggests the mystique and mystery of the Sundarbans through its poetry (the quality of which is somewhat uneven — Ghosh does not have equal felicity over both mediums, prose and poetry, which comes naturally to other writers, for instance, Margaret Atwood or Vikram Seth), accompanied by brilliant artwork by the renowned artist Salman Toor (who featured in the 'Time 100 Next' list). This is a fabulously illuminated edition of a popular folk tale, echoing

Ghosh's concerns about climate crisis and humanity's other ecological misadventures (The Great Derangement). As he forewarned in a recent interview, "Let us look at the biggest disruption that we have ever faced - this pandemic. Again pandemics were thought to be impossible. We thought medicine had conquered everything, we had conquered nature and look at us. One tiny pathogen has absolutely frozen the world in its tracks...I think the United States is actually a very good example of so called 'progress' gone completely awry.... The directions of rivers have been changed, hundreds of dams have been created and now what we see is really that the landscape itself is revolting. Climate change has created a circumstance where the landscape is coming undone. But they are now in a situation where they can't step back, they have to do more and more engineering. So they have to create continuous circumstance of reengineering the landscape even as it is coming undone in front of our eyes. In India we still haven't reached that point of reengineering landscapes, but now the government is talking about it. And we can completely predict the direction that it will take. It will end in utter disaster. So it is several things coming together at the same time and these things are not separate. We have these heavily sort of reengineered landscapes which are completely interfered with by humans and you have climate change. Already in India we are beginning to see these catastrophic impacts look at Chennai for example. All over the flood plain, they are building in the river channels, they are building close to the sea... you can't win against water. How much will the sea level rise if people are building in this way, obviously it is going to end in catastrophe."

Ghosh is doing what bards and prophets have done for centuries: singing a cautionary tale about the calamitous armageddon which mankind is inexorably setting up for itself. In the past, villagers would see beyond the narrative and recognize the moral implications. The point is, would millenials? This short work, and others similar too it, must be made required reading for children all

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

over the world so that it does not need for any more Greta Thunbergs in future.

**Dr. Supantha Bhattacharyya** Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Hislop College, Nagpur.

# **Poetry Section**

# **Corona Crisis**

### Ranjana Sharan Sinha

1.

Ominous silence, paralyzing fears,
Lingering shadows of death,
Panicked people, unheard challenges
Uncertainty in every breath!
Shuttered shops and empty squares
Present dismal anticipations;
Stray dogs and hungry animals
Scout for titbits in utter deapair!

2.

I sit in my garden with plants
And pray to God to give strength
To tide over the troubled times:
My musings with spiritual wavelength!
Trumped-shaped petunias:
Pretty with leaves sessile,
The flowers in prismatic colours
Send a divine memo to an anthophile!

3.

The apocalypse--A devouring dragon, Let's pause to ponder and correlate,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

The pandemic and wildlife destruction
Are interrelated-- No debate!
It's a warning shot from Nature
To protect wildlife and biodiversity
As a great countermeasure,
Never evade species integrity!

4.

Now we know it's the outbreak-Open the window of your heart:
Love, good vibes in the soul's lake-Don't let them fall apart!
I reach out and transmit love
With a poet's assiduous empathy,
Words and feelings my avenue,
Amity, hope, infinite sympathy!

**Dr. Ranjana Sharan Sinha**Prof of English (Rtd)
S.B.City College, Nagpur

# **Pandemic to Poetry**

### Ranjana Sharan Sinha

The world screeches to a halt, Brooding besets the brain--Dark like grey-black asphalt, Worse than a hurricane!

> The time of spirralling chaos; Inexpressible loss endured: Quarantine and helpless echoes, Uncounted deaths, how many cured?

Locked in a titanic struggle With the pandemic peaked, The moon conquerors try to juggle, Trying all the protective shields!

> Amid social pain and solitude, I take out my ache in poetry--Turning to words with gratitude, The realities bitter and scary!

I know words are powerful, Provoking potent emotions, Offering comfort: soft & soulful Amid the gloom of coronavirus.

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Pause, listen, and reflect--Small gestures of love and kindness Make you reach out with your heart Conquering the sea of hopelessness.

Feel the beauty of being alive; Do things for others and pray, Never lose the zest and drive; Let hope light your way!

> The magic montage of blue skies--Wait for the silver lining: Somewhere within the shrouds, You'll find the sun rising!

Don't give up, don't give in, From failures bounce back, Let courage blossom deep within Amid the major setback!

**Dr. Ranjana Sharan Sinha**Prof of English(Rtd)
S.B.City College, Nagpur

# My Mother's Many Admirers

### Supantha Bhattacharyya

It was the stuff of family lore,
How, when father carried her with pride,
On the seat of his rickety bike,
Singing romantic songs by Tagore,
To his newlywed fairy bride,
There would be accidents galore,
As passersby, catching one look
Would crane their necks for as long as it took,
And bump into earthly objects.

Growing up, we too would watch amused, Complete strangers, in her regal presence, Fidget and fumble, grow confused, Stare at the the ground and mumble, Erratic, adolescent nonsense.

Mother died bent, bested and broken,
But when we consigned her,
To the strangely reluctant pyre,
She took a long time to turn to ashes,
As if she'd found a final admirer – the fire!

**Dr. Supantha Bhattacharyya** Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Hislop College, Nagpur.

# The Emperor's Newest Garments

### Supantha Bhattacharyya

Now, it is not just the monarch any more,
But his entire coterie — courtiers, sycophants,
All of whom sashay about without a stich on,
Strutting the fancy, invisible stuff.
While we, the hungry and the angry,
Watch the naked, shameless pageant,
Not quite knowing what to make of it,
Only, that we've had enough!

Nobody is yet aware, but they are coming —
The little children who've broken out of prisons,
And are rushing to face their captors,
They'll arrive in their millions, cackling with glee,
Point fingers at the high-and-mighty,
And ask at last, "Hey king, where are your clothes?"

**Dr. Supantha Bhattacharyya** Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Hislop College, Nagpur.

# Life in the Times of Pandemic

### Mrs. Priti Singh

The pestilence came back again with a vengeance

Originating from Wuhan in China, it crossed every border and boundary.

Striking humans down heartlessly heedless to their grievance;

The entire world was gripped in gloom, projecting pictures very scary.

In this information age driven by technology it groped for answers and solutions.

Life threatening it was, with the virus in a state of flux and mutation.

WHO, on March 11, 2020 declared it as a Pandemic...

Lockdowns were imposed, mankind was in a state of utter shock and panic.

Restrictions were inflicted, the face with a Mask was covered,

Physical meeting was a big NO NO and Social Distancing had to be observed.

As hospitals became over crowded, infected areas turned into Containment Zones.

No one was spared, the aged and the young were equally prone.

Armed with latest kits of Medicare the medical fraternity became the Corona Warriors

Treating the infected day and night, trying to overcome every challenge and barrier.

Sanitizers and soaps gained importance meaning to keep the virus at bay,

Vol. 1 No. 11 Jan-Dec. 2021

Consumption of warm water and steam as never before, became the norm every day.

Schools, colleges and offices shut down, Work from Home was the new normal.

The virtual world became prominent, life suddenly became very formal.

With salaries slashed, some jobless, many were threatened of unemployment,

An exodus of migrants beaming by the news channels was rife and rampant.

With the GDP falling to an all time low, there was a great economic slowdown,

Taking advantage of the acute crisis, China started to blow its horn,

Trying to overpower its neighbors it renewed its policy of expansion.

 $Even when the lockdowns \, ease \, the \, threat \, of \, the \, virus \, looms \, large,$ 

Life is limping back to normalcy with safety nets on the barge.

Diligent scientist and researchers work relentlessly searching for a cure,

The threat will be over and a vaccine invented soon, they positively ensure.

A hundred years ago it was the killer 'Spanish Flu' marauding on the scene,

Exactly a century after the Pandemic has taken the form of the threatening COVID - 19.

Mrs. Priti Singh Assistant Professor Department of English Dr. Ambedkar College, Nagpur.

# Youth And I

### **Priti Singh**

Elusive youth happened to tell me one day:

"Look, my pretty dear, with you I cannot forever stay,

Anti-ageing products you may use but it can hardly keep me at bay.

Old age is standing at the threshold and gently pushing me away,

Welcome it with open arms because now that is only your mainstay".

I couldn't believe how time had flown,

Wishing it could've waited and not left me all alone.

I tried to clutch to my youth, grateful for all the kindness it had shown,

Beseeching it to stay a little longer till I became more mature and grown.

Proud Youth, adamant and resolute as it was said it could hardly render solace,

Nevertheless, whispered kindly, "Look my dear, true beauty is never of the face,

But it lies in the immaculate glow which emanates from inner grace.

Mrs. Priti Singh Assistant Professor Department of English Dr. Ambedkar College, Nagpur.

# Cenacle: A Peer reviewed Annual Journal of English

ISSN 2231-0592 Cosmos Impact Factor 5.450

#### Code of Ethics

This Code of Ethics has been evolved for the publications in the research journal titled "Cenacle". It has been developed to articulate the importance of integrity and maintain high quality of research material that is being published.

All the authors/poets/reviewers are expected to submit original work, which has not been published elsewhere.

Plagiarism and passing of another's work as one's own is not permitted.

Resorting to plagiarism and misrepresentation of involvement or authorship, amount to a failure to adhere to meet ethical standards and integral practices. Such actions mandates to redo and directions for resubmission or deletion.

There should be honesty in collection of data, data analysis and interpretation, methods and procedures, results writing, and publication status and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required which should not affect the research which is be open to criticism and new ideas.

Proper acknowledgement, citation or credit should be given.

The Editors will always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies when needed.

Any violation of the Code of Ethics will result in immediate rejection of the manuscript/paper, without further consideration.

# Call for Papers

(Vol. 12)

Cenacle is a peer reviewed, annual National Journal of English which endeavors to promote research in Literature and language. The next issue of Cenacle: Volume I. No, 12, which will be published in January 2022, will have as the focus area - **happiness as a theme**. In *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Bronte had observed, "I would rather be happy than dignified", ages ago which is still very pertinent. George Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion* has proclaimed: "Happy is the man who can make a living by his hobby." Happiness, contentment, well being or enjoyment are very important to humans and literature reflects upon it in many different ways.

United Nations in 2012 proclaimed 20 March as the International day of happiness. It was to recognize the relevance of happiness and well being as universal goals and aspirations. So we found it apt that after the stressful and taxing times of the pandemic, we should celebrate literature which reflects the pursuit of happiness in many different shapes. Happiness in literature can be found in fiction, poetry, drama, children's literature, romantic comedy and so on. This elusive concept needs to be reflected in a deeper manner, which we are sure our contributors will take up for the next issue.

The innocent world of PG Woodhouse or Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, short stories of Hemingway or poetry of Shakespeare, Wordsworth or Keats, to name a few reflect different facets of happiness. There is large gamut of non fictional books written on happiness like by Dalai Lama to professors of psychology and economists, which are like manuals to a happier state of mind. It can be also explored as to why they become bestsellers and how they help generally to provide a sense of meaning. The focus area will try to explore the definition of happiness as portrayed through different genres in different periods of time and through different perspective of writers/poets/playwrights/ cinematographers and non-fictional writers exploring this concept deeply. The focus area can be enlarged to regional writings to world literature of any period and genre.

Contributors are requested to select areas which can become source for further research. Only original unpublished papers will be selected.

We also invite Book Reviews on recent publication (2020-21). The book reviews should be accompanied by the jpg format of the book reviewed. The write up should not exceed 2000 words.

Selected Poems are also published with a short bio-note of the poet.

All contributions must reach us by last week of Jan. 2022.

The research paper should not exceed 3500 words. Each paper should have an abstract of 150-200 words with 8-12 key words. This is the format of the journal. The writers should conform to MLA style sheet 8<sup>th</sup> edition. Only softcopies will be accepted. Peers have the right to reject/modify articles.

#### Contact:

Email <shubhamishra2007@gmail com> M: 09422802462