



Depiction of Pandemic and Resultant Fear in English Literature

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Abstract

The proposed article attempts to analyze pandemic and fear as described and portrayed in English literary creations and try to find out the healthy solutions. English Literature has immensely helped us frame our reactions and responses to the crisis such as COVID-19 and like contagion from time to time.

Keywords: *CORONA, Fear, Pandemics, Human, Contagion*

Present times are characterized by global sense of worry, fear, anxiety, restlessness, discontentment, and annoyance. The reason of this can even be explained by a child of five. Corona caused COVID 19 crisis is playing havoc with the so called human achievements and advancements may it be science, technology, medicine or anything else over which we humans have a lot airy boastings so far. Whatever may have been the causes of its origin, the facts of which will be before us in coming days, it has affected each and everyone in multifaceted ways- many are dead while scores are infected and a lot are in constant fear, and people have lost homes and jobs. It has quarantined everything human, posing great danger to all forms of human existence may it be social, financial or whatsoever. It has paralyzed and left us stunned, surprised and confused. Everything seems not working

Special Issue

457

May 2020

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One Day International Webinar On ***“Borders, Migration and Pandemic”*** Organized by
Department of English, Rajkumar Kewalramani Kanya Mahavidyala Linguistic Minority(Sindhi) Institution &
Prerna College of Commerce, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India

Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The Cite Factor, COSMOS



IMPACT FACTOR – 5.61

LangLit

ISSN 2349-5189



An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

except the mercy of the Nature. This event of Corona outbreak is not new in the annals of human history and civilization, although the type of the virus is defined as novel Corona virus. Times and situations have never been in the human stride although he has long been digging hard to control these without any success. The only proven remedy has been to surrender unconditionally completely, which can save us and our loved ones. Literature being a true image reflecting mirror of society has never been short of descriptions of such historic events of pandemic and human suffering. The proposed article attempts to analyze pandemic and fear as described and portrayed in English literary creations and try to find out the healthy solutions. Literature has immensely helped us frame our reactions and responses to the crisis such as COVID-19 and like contagion from time to time.

Jack London's, a US writer and journalist, novel *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) was one of the first examples of a post apocalyptic fiction novel in modern literature. Even though it was published more than a century ago, *The Scarlet Plague* deals with a contemporary human concern of pandemics and lets the readers to reflect and ruminate on the global sense of insecurity and worry. This presents a fear that remains very much alive. Many traditional issues of the themes of plague, morality and justice to the contagion and clinical features of the disease are well depicted in *The Scarlet Plague*. The author has focused his attention on human aspect of behavioral responses to a pandemic, showing the resultant fear, irrational response, and other human vices in civilized and modern society. We have an ancestral tendency of fear toward infectious diseases which *The Scarlet Plague* brings out as an important part of a long literary tradition, inviting the reader to probe into deep human psychology. London's many stories, apart from the mentioned novel, have pandemics and infectious diseases as their content. London's novel and stories inspired a lot other literary works on similar issues.

In old days plague and pestilence were frequent problems and people then had a very scary imagination of the situation they were facing, an experience of live fear and worry. There were no defenses against such disease like plague, no medicine could help, and no one

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could stop it from making people sick; the only way to safety was to isolate from infected persons and objects. The belief in the supernatural origin of pandemics added panicky flavor to the rampant ravages of the spreading disease. There are references of divine interference in such human calamities in Greek literary texts, such as Homer's *Iliad* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Homer's *Iliad* opens with a plague visited upon the Greek camp at Troy to punish the Greeks for Agamemnon's enslavement of Chryseis. During medieval period works such as *The Decameron* by Boccaccio and *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer laid emphasis on human psychological responses to the pandemics. The fear of contagion flared up human vices like avarice, greed, and corruption, which paradoxically led to infection and thus to both moral and physical death. COVID-19 will definitely pose a threat to several human systems like economy, society, family etc. The world is shifting its ways of function such as online interaction has largely grown up. These texts provide us an insight to handle present situations as they were previously managed as well as ideas about how we may reconstruct our lives more efficiently in the aftermath of such crisis.

Human reactions to the plague are also the central themes of historical titles such as *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe, a long narrative of events regarding the Great Plague of London of 1665. Similarly Alessandro Manzoni, an Italian novelist in his *The Betrothed* and *History of the Column of Infamy*, has given an extraordinary description of the plague that struck Milan around 1630. *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Shelley was one of the novels describing a world that had been ravaged by a plague where a few persons could save themselves by avoiding contact with others. The American poet and novelist Edgar Allan Poe published *The Masque of the Red Death* in 1842; a short story uniquely relates itself to the literary tradition of the plague. Through the personification of the plague represented by a mysterious figure disguised as a Red Death victim the author tries to bring out the terror of the pandemic. The matter is not that people die of plague but they are a bit more plagued by the fear of death. In the 20th century, Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1942) and Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) brought out social and medical implications of plague-like epidemics where

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solution and control of disease lacked. Similarly, in his 2016 novel *Fever*, South African author Deon Meyer details the apocalyptic fallout of a weaponised, bioengineered virus that results in enclaves of survivors besieging one another for resources.

Despite considerable advancement in the field of medicine and drugs man has not completely been free from fear of diseases and deaths. Worldwide epidemics like influenza in 2009, avian influenza in 2005-2006, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 have largely shown the people's scary reactions to such pandemics. This is same with COVID 19 where nobody has solution and everybody is awe stricken and in panic. Medical and security service professional are struggling hard to control the spread of the disease. People have recognized these professionals as real heroes in place of political leaders and Bollywood stars. Even people now understand that even scientists make mistakes while handling germs and viruses. Scientists, Doctors, Health care workers, Police and security personnel and others involved in serving the society at large are acclaimed highly by people. We know for sure that no human suffering is permanent, one day or the other COVID19 will soon be on the pages of history. But what about the human emotions and feelings regarding such pandemics and contagion, we need to do something about it. Because Pandemics come and go but human fears, worries and such kind of related emotions are permanent and are our prime concern unless we deal with them positively. COVID 19 has once again given expression to these human feelings which we need manage with efficacy and solidarity.

The main object of my article is to share what we can positively do about fighting such pandemics and traumas in the time where we are leading to a very new world with new problems. There is a lot of confusion about such diseases due to rumors spread intentionally or by ignorance on audio-visual e-media. Even people have now regarded news channels as unauthentic because of the rubbish they telecast. The government is making utmost efforts in educating and protecting the people as never before and we must appreciate that. We should always rely only upon the instructions and guidelines issued by the government and WHO regarding COVID19 and never believe the rumors. We need manage our emotional life to

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deal with fear and worry by practicing yoga, prayer and meditation following the suggestions of AYUSH Mantralaya. We should follow physical distancing and remain emotionally connected with our loved ones. We should help the needy and never be rude and callous to others in bad condition. Fear is inevitable but panic is no solution; let's have faith and courage to fight COVID19. We are fortunate enough to be safe at home, though it's a little bit new experience. We should look at lockdown as an opportunity for new mental and emotional adventures, new vista for learning and sharing and this would shake off our so called fear and worry. We can easily manage the present situation by remaining calm and serene, which even would enable us to face the aftermath of this ongoing crisis.

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