The Coronavirus, Lockdown, Home Quarantine Phase and Literature

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the communities and individuals not only the risk of death from infection but also multiple challenges. The physical, psychological and emotional life of the people has been threatened by preventative measures and restrictions in the form of the lockdown and social distancing. This has locked up about 4 billion people worldwide and made the people live with terror. In these moments of crisis, the literature sheds light and inspires humanity to keep calmness intact. Starting from Homer's Iliad to Ling Ma's Severance, hundreds of pandemic tales have portrayed how humans react to such public health emergencies and provided ways to cope with these catastrophes. In their writings, writers have projected these crises over the years, not only stressing their tremendous effect on the globe and society, but also the strength of human minds to tackle them. Over the long tradition of literature, Indian or Western, catharsis has always been one of the functions of literature- a way of dealing with intense emotions, a way of purgation, a way of healing. Literature plays an important role in shaping our responses, providing relief and consoling us in such crises. The literature has played a wonderful job in encouraging Man to think about what he has done and what he should and will do to face such situations.

KEY WORDS: COVID-19, LITERATURE AND PANDEMICS, PANDEMICS AND HUMANITY, CORONAVIRUS.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic put civilization at risk and subjected all humanity to an unprecedented challenge. The World Health Organization has declared this outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) as a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern" (World Health Organization, 2020) and called it a global pandemic. We all are facing the challenges of this pandemic, regardless of age, gender, race or location. It has caused sport, social, cultural and educational programs and events to be postponed or cancelled. Universities, colleges and schools have closed in almost countries of the world affecting the majority of the teacher-student population worldwide. According to the latest data of UNESCO, "over 1.2 billion students worldwide have been affected due to school closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In India, over 320 million students have been affected" (UNESCO,

2020). According to the COVID Action Platform of the World Economic Forum, this pandemic has "shuttered economies around the world has also battered education systems in developing and developed countries. Some 1.5 billion students – close to 90% of all primary, secondary and tertiary learners in the world – are no longer able to physically go to school" (Kandri, 2020). The present paper attempts to explore the role of literature in earlier pandemics and epidemics with special reference to present coronavirus pandemic, its lockdown and home quarantine phase.

The Covid-19 Pandemic And Its Effect On Humanity: This pandemic has brought to the communities and individuals not only the risk of death from infection but also multiple challenges. The physical, psychological and emotional life of the people has been threatened by preventative measures and restrictions in the form of the lockdown and social distancing. This has locked up about 4 billion people worldwide and made the people live with terror. This fear caused confusion in many areas and seriously affected each and every sector. The teaching-learning community, too, have suffered a lot in different ways and are going through tremendous stress.

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The world could not have thought at the beginning of the year 2020 that in the 21st century, where medical science has so far spread its wings, a "mere" virus would transform our entire life and impact the entire society, the entire planet, collapse the whole system, place human beings at risk and cause turmoil and uncertainty at every move and in every breath.

The pandemic triggered by the outbreak of Covid-19 has taken us far away from our normal lives. This has affected all humanity. It has spread fear throughout the world and we have no idea when normalcy would be reinstated. Lockdown restrictions and social distancing are causing suffocation for us and this is making every person in this Globe panic and to think seriously about it. The corona outbreak and lockdown taught us a weighty lesson and made us re-examine our lifestyle. The Government and the various agencies are doing their utmost to tackle and eradicate this global ill. The medical and para-medical people, the police department and the Corona warriors are working day in and day out to help the affected. This is a time for each and every one of us, too, to think about it as an academic, as an intelligent community in society.

The Covid-19 Pandemic and Literature: Human struggle with epidemics and pandemics is as old as Earth and we have conquered it in very much till date. Whether it was the two World Wars, other epidemics or some other disease, in the midst of these crises, literature has never taken the rear seat and have always shown the road to recovery, both physically and spiritually. In these moments of crisis, the literature sheds light and inspired humanity to keep calmness enact. In their writings, writers have projected these crises over the years, not only stressing their tremendous effect on the globe and society, but also the strength of human minds to tackle them. We need to redefine the essence of the technology, recycle the framework of interest, provide social agreements, inculcate logical and scientific viewpoints, redistribute wealth and resources equally and so on. We need to develop discipline. We have to think that this virus is not the end of the planet. It is necessary to reconstruct a new system, a new approach that will integrate Humanities, Commerce, Science and Technology and Research into a broad ecological framework.

The literature has played a wonderful job in encouraging Man to think about what he has done and what he should and will do to face such situations. Starting from Homer's Iliad to Ling Ma's Severance, hundreds of pandemic tales have portrayed how humans react to such public health emergencies and provided ways to cope with these catastrophes. Chelsea Haith has rightly observed: From Homer's Iliad and Boccaccio's Decameron to Stephen King's The Stand and Ling Ma's Severance, stories about pandemics have – over the history of Western literature such as it is – offered much in the way of catharsis, ways of processing strong emotion, and political commentary on how human beings respond to public health crises (Haith, 2020).

Literary Responses To Pandemics And Epidemics And Its Present Relevance: Till date, different literary texts have played a role as a 'vaccine' and allowed humans to learn how to deal with such mishaps, befallen in the course of the history. By encouraging us to think about survival strategies during disasters and calamities, literature has proved to be provider of wisdom, inspiration and information. It taught humanity to remain patient and hopeful in such states of chaos, fear and hopelessness.

During moments of present Covid-19 crises, the people are losing their confidence and hope, they are afraid of and are in mental dilemmas, they are worried about what is going on? And what would happen next? So, what is the right path from which people can get the right directions and console? One of the answers for it maybe literature. By examination of the human condition and the depictive representation of pandemic in literary texts, literature guides us on how to survive through such storms. Literature is the right source for human mental resilience during such a time. It gives us a common sense of morality. It teaches us to be patient and to give importance to the self-control and preventive measures that are the main strategies to cope up with these kinds of epidemics. During all these periods of crises, literature helps to make us aware of the situation and to prepare for the future. Literature encourages us to preserve faith and to believe in a positive way because epidemics will not remain permanent and constant with us. They must be over after some time. If we take some care, we will save our lives. In present Covid-19, where people are under quarantine, social isolation and lockdown, literature makes us aware of circumstances and helps to face it.

Many authors have attempted to depict the human being facing natural disasters, epidemics and other calamities. We need to learn and appreciate the literature that has been published in previous pandemics and its social function of protecting and guiding humanity in crisis times. For example, a 1947 novel by Albert Camus, The Plague, is about a plague epidemic that has consequences for a quarantined Algerian city. This novel is like a mental and psychological cure for the society that is affected by Covid-19 today. It's a novel that can help us think about what we're experiencing and help mankind heal. The role of literature during the traumatic stage in restoring the broken trust and loss of core values in life is very important. Literature is forever considered to be man's best mate. Literature is genuinely significant and has a marked impact on the minds and understandings of humans.

These narratives in the literature emphasize the historical context and also offer a stimulus that inspires us- "This tough time 'too' will pass and new hope of rays will arrive for the betterment of human life." It not only explores the causes of the mishaps, its effects on society, the economy and the political scenarios, but it also describes that humans are not the supreme power on earth and can become helpless in such tough times and that we are not supposed to be malicious towards animals and

nature. Mr. Sanjay Bhoosreddy in his article published in Times of India rightly said:

All these events, point strongly towards an imbalance in nature, largely manmade and creating conflicts with environment, animals and humans, disturbing the health and ecosystem. Sharing of history and literature is important because it keeps the account of the trials and tribulations of the difficult times of pestilence and pandemics but also shows the influence that it has in changing the belief and understanding of the masses over time of the pests, bacteria and viruses from the traditional beliefs to scientific understanding, which is essential for better handling of pandemics by the entire citizenry thereby reducing the burden on the governments and ultimately on the public exchequer. (Bhoosreddy, 2020)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, just take Coronavirus as a strict alarm bell, before the final bell sounds, we humans have to amend ourselves! It is literature which would teach us- not to be cruel towards animals, not to be wild towards environment and nature... otherwise, we will have to pay its penalty and face calamity, maybe one more like COVID-19.

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