

## PANDEMIC AND LITERATURE

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### **Abstract**

*Humans dominate this planet earth for more than twenty thousand years, but for past two years humanity is dominating by a virus named COVID-19. Humanity faced many crises especially in the last centuries like war and other pandemics like Influenza, Cholera, etc... Though COVID-19 is new to humanity, pandemic is very familiar to humanity. In other hand literature "mirror of life" it reflects the life of human. Pandemic literature is a branch of literature which deals with the writing during the pandemic times. The main objective of this paper is tracing the history of pandemics through literature.*

### **Pandemic and Literature**

The word pandemic comes from the Greek word 'Pandemos' (pan+demos) literally means every people. Some notable pandemics in history of humanity are Antonine Plague (165 A.D), Cyprian Plague (250 A.D), Justinian Plague (541 A.D), 11<sup>th</sup> Century Leprosy, The Black Death (1350 A.D), The Columbian Exchange, The Great Plague of London, First Cholera Pandemic (1817), The Third Plague Pandemic (1855), Fiji Measles Pandemic, Russian Flu (1889), Spanish Flu (1918), Asian Flu (1957), SARS (2003), and COVID-19.

"A pandemic is an epidemic occurring on a scale that crosses international boundaries, usually affecting people on a worldwide scale, A disease or condition is not is not a pandemic merely because it is widespread or kills many people; it must also be infectious" ("Pandemic"- 25 Feb 2022)

### **People and Pandemic**

In ancient time people considered pandemics and epidemics as the curse of the God. Bible is a religious text many Christians believes it is record of the history, but it is not authentic. *The Holy Bible* records the very famous pandemic happened in Egypt. In the Exodus 9:9 of The Holy Bible talks about the "Ten Plagues" sent by God to Egypt to save the Israelites from the slavery. It also talks about the plague that creates the boils in the body of both humans and animals.

Mythology of Greek and Rome records the various types of pandemics and epidemics. People of Greece and Rome considered Pandemic as the Punishment of the God to the humanity. The people of Tamil Nadu consider small pox as the form of god; they associate small pox with their small deity "Mariamman" God of rain and fertility. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century people associate pandemics and epidemics with the celestial things.

## **Pandemic Literature**

Pandemic literature is a branch of the literature which focuses on sociology, psychology and human behavior as how they fear on contagious effect of the diseases. It also deals with the life style of the people during the time of pandemics; it also talks about the trauma faced by the people during the pandemics and post pandemic period.

### ***Oedipus Rex and Pestilence***

*Oedipus Rex* is the one of the greatest tragedies ever written in the world literature, it is based on the myth of the Oedipus who is the mythical ruler of the city Thebes in Greece. In *Oedipus Rex*, the tragic hero Oedipus killed his father and married his mother unknowingly. In this play Oedipus and other fellow characters tried to surmount the fate of the god with their knowledge but they failed tragically and they earned the anger of the God. As a punishment God unleashed the Pestilence (unknown fatal epidemic) into the city of Thebes.

### ***Iliad and Plague***

During the medieval time people considered the pandemics as the wrath of the God, *Iliad* is an epic poem written by the classical Greek poet "Homer" in his epic he wrote about the pandemic caused by the Lord Apollo as a punishment for kidnapping Chryseis, a daughter of Apollo's Priest. This plague lasted for nine days and it destroyed the whole town after nine days Odysseus returned Chryseis to his father to bring end to this plague.

"...he in wrath

Against the king had stirred throughout the hest

Fell plague, whereby the troops lay perishing :"(Iliad lines 11-13)

### ***The Decameron and Quarantine***

*The Decameron* is a collection of novellas written by the fourteen century Italian poet and writer Boccaccio during the time of the Black Death in Italy, in this story group of seven women and three men flee out from Florence which is affected by plague to deserted villa in the country side of Fiesole for isolate themselves for two weeks. In this collection people entertain themselves by telling 10 stories per day for 10 days. The themes of the stories are religious satire, unsatisfied desire for sexual pleasures, love, violence, betrayal and cruel murders.

### ***A Journal of the Plague Year and Economic depression:***

In 1722 Daniel Defoe wrote a book named *A Journal of the Plague Year* it describes the story of the alone young man who lives in the London during the time of the Great Plague of the London. This book shows the post pandemic situation and post pandemic trauma. The narrator describes about the empty streets of the London filled with Plague doctors and humans are afraid of the each other and struggles of leading life with empty stomach because of the economic depression and economical imbalance.

The people of London didn't follow the protocols made by the government and streets were filled with the death body. The Great Plague created chaos in the streets of London and people were roaming among the death to find supplies for their families. Government arranged death cart to collect the death bodies from the streets and supply slice of bread to homeless. The poor people lost their jobs, middle class people lost their wealth and upper class people isolate themselves from others to save themselves from the Plague. The Great Plague stopped the growth of the country and people lost their faith in religion. The Great Plague was ended by the Great fire of London which destroyed all the rat in the streets of the London which caused plague.

### ***The Last Man***

The Last Man is a dystopian post-apocalyptic novel written by Mary Shelly published in 1826. Author sets this novel in 21<sup>st</sup> century where people are affected by new pandemic created by unknown mysterious virus which sweeps away the population very rapidly across the globe and created the fear of extinction of the humanity.

“The vast cities of America, the fertile plains of Hindustan, the crowded Adodes oh the chinese, are menaced with utter ruin” (Mary Shelly)

The government became unstable due to low population and author tries to find out the scientific reason about the cause of the pandemic. Though this novel is a political satire it is very relevant with the COVID-19 situation. Mary Shelly finished this novel with the picture of lone inhabitant in the earth to show the sufferings and fear of the humanity.

### ***Masque of Red Death***

*The Masque of Red Death* is a Short story written by American writer, poet and Critic “E.A. Poe”. The plot of the story revolves around the masque organized by prince Prospero during the time of plague.

“The ‘Red Death’ had long devastated the country. NO Pestilence had ever been fatal, or hideous. Blood was Its avatar and its seal-the redness and the horror of blood” (Masque of Red Death)

The story begins with the description of the bloody state of the infected people, where people are suffering with pain and agony created by the plague. The duty of the prince is save the people from plague but he never considered about them and he enjoys his luxurious life but he faced the plague in the masque and he died.

### ***The Plague***

The plague is 1947 novel written by Albert Camus it is about deadly plague that happened in Europe. Camus symbolizes the Second World War as the plague; he says plague is the good opportunity to explore what it means to be human and what crisis

does to humanity. The characters of the novel try to emphasize the importance of the humanity during the critical times. Father Paneloux is a Jesuit priest, summons the God during the time of the pandemic because he thought the plague was caused by the anger of the God and he was infected by the plague but his prayer brought courage and hope in the minds of the people. Though he suffered from illness he done his duty well, the protagonist of the novel Dr.Rieux conclude the cause for Father Paneloux is unknown because he wants people to have hope that created by Father Paneloux.

“to simply say what we learn in the midst of plagues:

There are more things to admire in men than to despise.”(Albert Camus)

### **Summation**

Humanity faced lot of crisis from the very beginning and each crisis made humanity strong and civilized. The pandemics helped humanity to develop their facility like medicine, social structure, and political order etc... it also helps humanity to develop critical thinking and problem solving capacity. Even in COVID-19 situations humanity express itself at its best form by expressing the love towards others and helping at every level. People comes up with lot of innovative ideas during the quarantine, medical field achieved highest milestone by inventing vaccine for COVID-19, technology helped people to connect with everyone and education finds new medium for learning. Literature flourished again during the quarantine many people start to read books and watch good movies for its Aesthetic value. Though literature is not a history books which records the fact as fact, it records the facts with fancy. The different works of pandemic literature helps people to understand the lifestyle and economic situation of people during the all past pandemic.

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