Impact of Pandemic on Language and Literature

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Introduction

We are going through the pandemic situation from last two years. In case of India, exactly before a couple of years, we were introduced to some rigid restrictions due to the outbreak of Covid-19. We the people, who believe to live with each other, choose to be in isolation too. This pandemic was nothing but an emergency situation affecting the whole system by various means. It had and having its effect psychologically, economically, socially etc. But these are not just the areas that got affected. Language and literature are also the areas which has gone through tremendous changes in these years. The present paper also explores the point that how literature has helped in such situations before too. It has always showed mankind an optimistic way of thinking.

Key words: Pandemic, Language, Literature, Covid-19.

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The word "Pandemic" comes from the Greek "pan" meaning "all" and "demos" meaning "the people". The word commonly takes to refer to a widespread epidemic of a contagious disease throughout the whole of a country or one or more continents at the same time (Honigsbaum, 2009).internally accepted definition of a pandemic as it appears in the Dictionary of Epidemiology is straightforward and well known: an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people. (Harris, 2000). (The Pandemic and its Impacts: Health, Culture and Society; P. No. 03)(1)

History has witnessed many significant disease outbreaks including Black Death, Spanish Flu, Hong Kong Flu, SARS, H7N9, Ebola etc.Some of the major epidemics/ pandemics are given below:

1. Prehistoric Epidemic (CIRCA 3000 B.C.)
2. Plague of Athens (430 B. C.)
3. Antonine Plague (A. D. 165-180)
4. Plague of Cyprian (A. D. 250-271)
5. Plague of Justinian (A. D. 541- 542)
6. The Black Death (1346-1353)
7. Cocoliztli Epidemic (1545-1548)
8. American Plagues (16th Century)
9. Great Plague of London (1665-1666)
10. Great Plague of Marseille (1720-1723)
11. Russian Plague (1770-1772)
12. Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic (1793)
13. Flu Pandemic (1889-1890)
14. American Polio Epidemic (1916)
15. Spanish Flu (1918-1920)
16. Asian Flu (1957-1958)
17. AIDS Pandemic and Epidemic (1981-present)
18. H1N1 Swine Flu Pandemic (2009-2010)
19. West African Ebola Epidemic (2014-2016)
20. Zika Virus Epidemic (2015-present)

Wide geographic extension, disease movement, novelty, severity, high risk rates, explosiveness, infectiousness and contagiousness are some of the key features of pandemics showcasing always a negative impact on the society.

We all know that the outbreak of Covid-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China.

There are some straightforward effects of Covid-19 on people. Our vocabulary has got many new words due to this pandemic.

For Ex.- 1. Quarantine (Separating and restricting the movements of people who were exposed to the contagious disease to see if they become sick).
2. Lockdown (The imposition of stringent restrictions on travel, social interactions and access to public spaces).
3. Asymptomatic (Silent careers of the Covid-19 disease someone who is infected but does not present any kind of

    symptoms).

4. Comorbidity (A medical condition that increases a person's risk of becoming very sick if they develop Covid-19).
5. Containment zone (Geographical zone with limited access in or out to contain an outbreak).
6. PPE (Personal Protective Equipment).
7. WFH (Work From Home).
8. Social- distancing(Measure to avoid physical contact by maintaining physical distance among people).
9. Sanitizer (Product that is used to reduce or eliminate germs).
10. Mask (The product which people use to cover face).

Even the professional events like "Seminars" have replaced by "Webinars" and same with the condition of "Conference" making them "e-Conference". There is a vast change in the sources of literature. Our education system has seen a shift from "Offline" to "Online". Technical effect can be seen on each and every sector of life. Our society has gone through a drastic change in many aspects. The language has got the influence of aloofness. In the contactless world of pandemic, the only platform available was virtual one. The paradigm of language has shifted.

Social media has also showed its importance in this period. Social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat have influenced each and every aspect of life.

In case of English language. It truly became 'lingua-franca' as the use of English has increased due to maximum use of social media. Its again a point to be noted that the language used on social media is grammatically correct or not. It's the reason of concern here. But it is always good to see the positive point of view.

It is not the thing that all effects are negative. Rather due to technology, 24*7 communication can happen. So continuous growth without any time limitation can happen in this vicious situation too.

Rabindranath Tagore's poem, "Where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high". It depicts the importance of being fearless. Fear is created because of ignorance, when we don't have basic understanding of life. In life, "Nothing is permanent". So, we should be grateful to whatever we have got. Milton's "On My Blindness", gives the same message to be grateful to God".

We can take the example of Albert Einstein's "Theory of Relativity", which states that, "We think that our problems are very big than any other problems". The person who has studied literature can understand that, life has conquered upon such many pandemics till date. The philosophy of life is provided by literature that gives us hope and optimism. These are the great gifts given by literature. Pandemic has always been a testing time. This pandemic period is not just a medical condition but it has its effect far more social, economic, psychological, ecological and so on that will be seen in some upcoming years.

If we think of Epidemic literature, we get some examples, like, Boccaccio's "Decameron", Mary Shelley's "The Last Man", Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway", Camus's "The Plague", Orhan Pamuk's "Nights of Plague: A Novel" etc. In the upcoming years, there are chances to witness some speculative fictions, dystopian novels, personal memoirs, factions (fact+ fiction) etc. We may have "Love in the time of Covid-19" like "Love in the time of Cholera", "Covid Times" like "Hard Times" and so on.

It is also possible that the effect on the writings can be seen after some years, may be, after a century, then chances of the titles may be "100 years of Covid-19" or such. As we know, the effect of "Old is Gold". The far one goes from the situation, the more the curiosity is seen. So, the writings can happen after many years so that the next generations will generate interest in the past severity. We can be telling to our children/grandchildren,

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

The time is challenging obviously. It needs strong mentality, intellect to keep ourselves out from any situation. There comes the need of language and literature. Science can save life but literature gives reason to rise, to live and let live. Science just analyses things but literature gives moral support. Man can be saved by medicines physically but literature works like nectar when it comes to live life. It gives direction to the skeleton. It is the soul of the superficial appearance of man. The body, the appearance of the man is the top of an iceberg but what matters more is mind, which is deeply rooted inside and that is the point to be noted.

The thing that is noticed now-a-days is the increasing fear of death. Is that the real concern? Was there any time when man was without fear? Man has always been in a mortal frame. Perhaps death is the only thing that is sure. It is ok to get panic when we go through such situation but man has got the gift of forgiveness. Art, literature helps to forgive things. Aesthetics is the term firstly used by Alexander Baumgarten in 18th century as the science of sensation and imagination. Debated take it back to Plato, who has stated that the poet writers when he is inspired, which means the poet does not have his own senses. Aristotle, on the other side, defended poet, art and emotions rather according to him, the presence of emotions in art make art more valuable and important and that is truth.

In medieval times too, Arts was given value and it was understood important in human life. Art is not merely to please. It has its own importance. Art transforms the essence of human experience into a world of aesthetics. Art is subjective but while being subjective, art transforms it into an object, which is perceived by senses. Art constantly moves between the two worlds- subjective and objective. Art is not just related with words or language. A painter can use colours, a musician can

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use his music notes. Actually, man is the mean by whom things are manifested. We can reveal our art, imagination through our thinking. If we go by Sartre, we will find a perception that is very interesting. According to this, the meaning to the world is given by us. The meaning to whatever happens is given by us.

An artist does the same. It is a dialogue between the artist and the receiver, which makes an art. It is our human consciousness, the way we perceive, it makes relationship between human being and the world. Sartre's connection can be seen with Roland Barthes' "Reader Response Theory". The readers response to the work of art is an important point and that is where the subjectivity of the reader meets the objective art. And through the objective art, the connection is established with the subjectivity of the artist. Every artist expresses himself through the medium but at the same time, we can say, every artist negate himself in some extent. Artist hides with the help of art and pours his feelings in art without any limitation. Thus, art becomes a space to be free in an unlimited way. Classics by Daniel Defoe, Camus or films on epidemics and pandemics, for ex, "Black Death" (released on 2010) by Christopher Smith, "Contagion" (released on 2011) by Steven Soderbergh, latest one "Virus" (released on 2009, by Aashiq Abu) on "Nipah" outbreak in Kerala. Why do we go back and study classics, literature from the past, from the various parts of the world? According to me, literature or any art form has dealt with reality at the proper time and challenges that human has faced in that time by revisiting the past, the reader understands the present situation.

In case of poetry, poets have that extraordinary capability to change boredom things into interesting one. For Ex- John Keats "Ode to Autumn", generally, autumn is considered as the season of decay in English literature but Keats has shown the pleasing side of autumn by using personification in the harsh reality. P. B. Shelley has shown hope with his lines, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" in his "Ode to West Wind". It shows that how romantic poets were pessimistic at the beginning but at the end of their poems, they became optimistic because they were acknowledged with nature's law. They are the representatives of a particular situation. They

In case of novels too, characters are not mere characters, they are world in themselves. According to Heidegger, "The use to exist before sometime, they are existing today too. They are world in themselves. The world is always non-objectual, to which we are subject as world is not collection of things- countable or uncountable. The world is always non-objectual, to which we are subject as long as the pass of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported in the things. These experiences make us human because these experiences reflect on the fundamental questions of life and what kind of engagement we can have and we should have. Art, for us, becomes a medium through which we reflect on their questions." For Ex.- Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" is not just talking about a girl but about the entire world through it. Art is not just an escape, rather it is not just to seek pleasure, it has always giving the broader everlasting message of life. As Shelley has depicted, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

We have seen harsh situations where people were migrating; children, elders, pregnant women walking barefoot, without anything to eat, travelling, some of them even died before their destination. This reality should be captured by writers too. The bringers of Covid-19 are almost not suffering but maximum victims are such people who were not in the process anywhere. The job of the artist should to question these issues.

Conclusion

The effects of this pandemic can be studied by both perspectives: optimistic and pessimistic. But why to look by negative way when there is the necessity of positive attitude. It is our duty to eradicate all negative thoughts from the mindsets of people and promote the view of hope among them. Finally, "Positive people can change us positively". And literature teaches us the same.

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