

**SHATTERED FAITH OF HUMANITY IN PANDEMIC LITERATURE****DR. SURENDER SINGH**Assistant Professor
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The present analysis compares and contrasts the phenomenon of pandemic and its effects on the faith of humanity. Pandemics are for the most part disease outbreaks that become widespread as a result of the spread of human-to-human infection. There have been many significant disease outbreaks and pandemics recorded in history, including Spanish Flu, Hong Kong Flu, SARS, H7N9, Ebola, Zika and most recent COVID-19. The term “pandemic” has not been defined by many medical texts, but there are some key features of a pandemic, including wide geographic extension, disease movement, novelty, severity, high attack rates and explosiveness, minimal population immunity, infectiousness and contagiousness, which help us to understand the concept better, if we examine similarities and differences among them. The pandemic related crises have been associated with enormous negative impacts generally on health, economy, society and security of national and global communities and specifically shattered faith of humanity in God and state.

Keywords: Pandemic, Faith, Apocalypse, Humanity, COVID-19.**Research Methodology**

Generally speaking, literature is descriptions of the nature, functions and characteristics of objects. Logical reasoning is applied to explore the logical relationship among objects, textual analysis and structural quantitative analysis for the present analysis.

Objective

The main objective of the present analysis is to sensitize people about pandemic and its related causes, effects, challenges and consequences generally, and to depict and delineate the shattered faith and struggling humanity for survival specifically.

Introduction

“People lost faith in their religion and...[abandoned] themselves to fate, where fatality is as unpredictable as where an arrow will land.”

*John Hatcher***Special Issue****13****July 2021**Website: www.langlit.org

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Despite the development of antimicrobial drugs, infectious diseases and germs continue to generate fear, as demonstrated by the worldwide epidemics of influenza A(H1N1) in 2009, avian influenza A(H5N1) in 2005–2006, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, as well as the potential for attacks with bioterrorism agents such as anthrax or smallpox. Several studies have been conducted to analyze and hypothesize about the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to epidemics among the public, in particular to provide policy makers and emergency responders with information about public perception and behavior in the aftermath of biological disasters, such as a deadly epidemic. A study in Switzerland analyzed the lay perceptions of collectives implicated in the 2009 influenza A (H1N1) outbreak and found that physicians and researchers were considered “heroes” of the pandemic. The most recent deadly Corona Virus radically shatters the faith of humanity in every aspect and respect. The study illustrate that the public placed trust mainly in scientists and doctors rather than in God and His shrine and political authorities and states, which were thought to be partly ineffective.

By exploring the motif of the pandemic, a consistent and well-spread theme in literature is part of a long literary tradition, inviting the reader to reflect on the ancestral fear of humans toward infectious diseases. In the ancient world, pandemic i.e. 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. This causal relationship between plague and sin is seen also in Greek literary texts, such as Homer’s Iliad and Sophocles’ Oedipus the King (429 BCE).

In contrast, the Greek historian Thucydides (c. 460–395 BCE), in his History of the Peloponnesian War, and the Latin poet Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE), in his De Rerum Natura, refuted a supernatural origin of the disease and focused their descriptions on the uncontrolled fear of contagion among the public. According to these authors, plague did not discriminate between the good and the evil but brought about the loss of all social conventions and a rise in selfishness and avarice.

Later medieval writings, such as The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) and The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400), emphasized human behavior: the fear of contagion increased vices such as avarice, greed, and corruption, which paradoxically led to infection and thus to both moral and physical death. Human reactions to the plague are also the central themes of historical titles such as A Journal of the Plague Year by Daniel Defoe (1659–1731), a long, detailed narrative of events, anecdotes, and statistics regarding the Great Plague of London of 1665. In a similar manner, The Betrothed and History of the Column of Infamy, both written by Italian novelist Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873), were extraordinary descriptions of the plague that struck Milan around 1630.

Special Issue

14

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In English-language literature, *The Last Man* (1826) by English novelist Mary Shelley (1797–1851) was one of the first apocalyptic novels, telling of a future world that had been ravaged by a plague; a few persons appear to be immune and avoid contact with others. The concept of immunization in this book demonstrates that the author, most famous for the novel *Frankenstein*, had a deep understanding of contemporaneous theories about the nature of contagion. Her main character is an asculinized roman a clef for Shelley herself, an aristocrat named Lionel Verney who lives through the emergence of global pandemic in 2073 up through the beginning of the 22nd century when he earns the titular status of *The Last Man*. By the time Verney begins his solitary pilgrimage across a desolated world, with only the ghosts of Homer and Shakespeare, and an Alpine sheepdog whom he adopts, he still speaks in a first person addressed to an audience of nobody. “Thus around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold...the LAST MAN.” Thus, in a world devoid of people, Verney becomes the book and the inert world becomes the reader.

In 1842, the American poet and novelist Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) published *The Masque of the Red Death*, a short story unique in the literary tradition of the plague by focusing only on the metaphorical element of the topos. Through the personification of the plague, represented by a mysterious figure disguised as a Red Death victim, the author meditates on the inevitability of death; the issue is not that people die from the plague, but that people are plagued by death.

In the novel, *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) by Jack London, at the beginning of the epidemic of Scarlet Death, the people appeared not to be alarmed because they “were sure that the bacteriologists would find a way to overcome this new germ, just as they had overcome other germs in the past”. Public trust in science was high in the 21st century society. However, the people were soon frightened by “the astonishing quickness with which this germ destroyed human beings, and [by] the fact that it inevitably killed any human body it entered. ... From the moment of the first signs of it, a man would be dead in an hour. Some lasted for several hours. Many died within ten or fifteen minutes of the appearance of the first signs”. The defeat of the science and medicine in which the people had placed trust generated fear in the population. London gave detailed insight into the human reactions to the spread of the disease. In particular, Granser tells his grandsons how the people started to run away from the cities in a blind panic:

“Thursday night the panic outrushes for the country began. Imagine, my grandsons, people, thicker than the salmon-run you have seen on the Sacramento river, pouring out of the cities by millions, madly over the country, in vain attempt to escape the ubiquitous death. You see, they carried the germs with them. Even the airships of the rich, fleeing for mountain and desert fastnesses, carried the germs.” (2)

Yet there was no escape. Germs were spreading, fast and uncontrolled. Nothing could stop it, and the world was in a state of sheer panic never experienced before. People started behave unreasonably: “we did not act in this way when ordinary diseases smote us. We were always calm over such things, and sent for the doctors and nurses who knew just what to do”. The population reacted to the outbreak of the plague in 2 ways: most tried in vain to isolate

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15

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themselves and fled to avoid the contagion, whereas a minority, mainly rioters, begun drinking, robbing, and sometimes even killing:

“In the midst of our civilization, down in our slums and labor-ghettos, we had bred a race of barbarians, of savages; and now, in the time of our calamity, they turned upon us like the wild beasts they were and destroyed us. And they destroyed themselves as well.”

As the human race in London’s world was dying, the earth was being devastated by fires and conflagrations: *“The smoke of the burning filled the heavens, so that the midday was as a gloomy twilight, and, in the shifts of wind, sometimes the sun shone through dimly, a dull red orb. Truly, my grandsons, it was like the last days of the end of the world”*. The end of the world: this is how the pandemic was perceived. Not only did the people fear their own death but they also had the terrible feeling of being at the end of the world: the cities were being destroyed by fire; the people were fleeing away in hysteria. This immense panic grew even more, frightening and unprecedented because of the stop in communication with the rest of the world, a hopeless sign of death: *“It was amazing, astounding, this loss of communication with the world. It was exactly as if the world had ceased, been blotted out”*. The apocalyptic scenario illustrates a common fear of epidemics. In the novel, as in reality, human reactions to plague can vary greatly, but still all share a terrible fear, the fear of death—both as the end of one’s life and as the end of civilization.

As the narrator of Albert Camus’s *The Plague*(1947) says as disease ravages the town of Oran in French Algeria, there is an *“element of abstraction and unreality in misfortune. But when an abstraction starts to kill you, you have to get to work on it.”* When confronted with the erraticism of etiology, the arbitrariness of infection, the randomness of illness, we must contend with the reality that we are not masters of this world. We have seemingly become such lords of nature that we’ve altered the very climate and geologists have named our epoch after humanity itself, and yet a cold virus can have more power than an army. Disease is not metaphor, symbol, or allegory; it is simply something that kills you without consideration.

Readers of Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore’s graphic novels *The Walking Dead* or viewers of George Romero’s brilliant zombie classics may assume that they’ll always be the ones to survive Armageddon, but those works can force us into a consideration of the profound contingency of our own lives. Cynics might say that the enjoyment derived from zombie narratives is that they provide a means of imagining that most potent of American fantasies—the ability to shoot your neighbour with no repercussions.

The most recent in December 2019, a pneumonia outbreak was reported in [Wuhan, China](#). On 31 December 2019, the outbreak was traced to a novel strain of coronavirus which was given the interim name 2019-nCoV by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), later renamed [SARS-CoV-2](#) by the [International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses](#). The Wuhan strain has been identified as a new strain of [Betacoronavirus](#) from group 2B with approximately 70% genetic similarity to the SARS-CoV. The virus has a 96% similarity to a bat coronavirus, so it is widely suspected to originate from bats as well.

Special Issue

16

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Covid-19 has completely arrested the entire world and the people are living restlessly and pessimistically. There was a devastating phase of 2nd Wave from 10th May to 15th June 2021, when corona virus was paving havoc and destroying our hope to live and survive. During this specific period, every family was struggling to save his near and dear in hospital or at home. People were wandering from pillar to post for oxygen cylinders and remdesivir injections. Hospitals were overcrowded with patients and shortage of ventilators were reported everywhere. The cremation grounds were heaped up of corpses and long lines of waiting were witnessed. The sand of Ganges Ghats and banks were the simplest burial place to dispose of the deceased. Death was dancing and hovering on human civilization. As of 29 July 2021, there have been at least *4,188,536 confirmed deaths and more than 196,040,884 confirmed cases in the COVID-19 pandemic.* The faith of humanity was completely battered, fettered and shattered in God and His omnipresent, omniscient existence. There is still dismay and despair of 3rd Wave of corona virus here, there and everywhere.

Conclusions

Pandemic sees no social stratification—it comes for bishop and authoritarian theocrat, king and clown alike. The ultimate theme of the literature of pandemic, born from the awareness that this world is not ours alone, is that we can't avert our eyes from the truth, no matter how cankered and ugly it may be in the interim. Something can be both true and senseless. Illness reminds us that the world isn't ours; literature lets us know that it is—sometimes. As literature shows in pandemic novels can bring forth deeply rooted fears and modify human behaviour greatly. The American novelist used the plague topos to criticize contemporary social structure: the destruction that follows the plague is both to be welcomed and despised. Indeed, the pandemic breaks the class barriers, but it also leads to the ruin of civilization. This is what critic Susan Sontag notes in *Illness as Metaphor* about how pandemic supplies “evidence of a world in which nothing important is regional, local, limited; in which everything that can circulate does, and every problem is, or is destined to become, worldwide,” so that products and viruses alike can freely move in a globalized world. Pandemic, indeed, shakes and shatters the deep-rooted faith of humanity in God and His saviour and redemption assumed mastery figure.

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Special Issue

17

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