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“Exploration of the Phenomenon of Human Resilience in Literary Texts”

Mr.Arun Duryodhan Pachore & Mr.Prashant Babar Bhandare,

Assistant Professor,

Miraj Mahavidyalaya, Miraj.

Corresponding Author: E-mail: arunpachore2018@gmail.com

Mobile No: 9421049408

Co-Author:E-mail: bhandareprashant79@gmail.com

Mobile No: 8605138916

Abstract:

The challenging and threatening circumstances give human life a boost or energy to use human brain for imagination. Human brain is gifted or blessed with power of imagination to dive deep into everything that comes to him in the destructive form. Perhaps it must be an evil omen that the entire world is passing through the stage of world's most ever witnessed painful suffering that is Covid-19. Natural calamities such as earthquake, flood, drought etc. have tremendously given a jolt to human peace, comfort and life itself on one hand and suffering and horrors caused by Genocides, War, Holocausts, Epidemics, Plague and measureless experiences of sexual exploitation like rape and torture on the other hand. But human being always hopes for better prospect though he or his ancestors are an eyewitness to all these life- threatening occurrences. One reason of his overcoming all these sufferings and horrors beyond his worst dreams is that he that is human being has proved his admirable power of human resilience that make him strong enough to adapt to the situation to overcome it with fortitude and hits back to the situation. It is well said that the pain you feel today is the strength you feel tomorrow. For every challenge encountered, there is an opportunity for growth. The resilience of human being has been accepting challenges in its various forms since time immemorial. It helps him to withstand such horrendous attacks as war, emotional and physical violation, brutality, deprivation, acute poverty, disasters and even life-threatening illness.

Keywords: circumstances, human brain, Covid-19, resilience, pandemic, Literary reflection.

Introduction:

A new wake- up call has been made to the entire humanity in the difficult times of Corona outbreak i.e. Covid-19. We all and our ancestors also have been facing life threatening forces. Covid-19, a new attack on humanity which we all are compelled to fight with appear a new danger and human being with his inner capacity is fighting with this new danger. The writers also attempt to reveal this inner capacity in their works. The present paper focuses on the exploration of the phenomenon of this human resilience reflected in literary texts. A wake-up call by world leaders to fight against gloomy times caused by Covid-19 lockdown and the news of suffering, death, separation and economic collapse from almost all corners of the world need to be thoroughly understood. This is the most risky period in the history of human life that made our life isolated from each other. It has made great impact on almost every walk of life. It appears that the entire world has become stand still. The medical field is trying its level best to save human lives but the suffering once again is beyond our worst dreams.

Many literary personalities such as Bronte sisters, Emily Dickinson, T.S.Eliot, Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway, Maya Angelou, Rabindranath Tagore, Victor Frank among others have successfully translated ,on various levels, a strong sense of individual resilience in the human spirit to bring about widespread change in mindsets so as to ensure a more positive approach to dismal and disturbing scenarios besides giving crumbling lives a reason to hope through building comfort and confidence for the future. A woman from Pune travelled for more than 200 km to meet her son in Aurangabad. Some labours, who could not return to their home due to unavailability of any transportation, travelled for more than 1500 km from Gulbarga to Nanded and from there to UP. These are just two instances of inner capacity of human being to adapt to the situation and overcome the difficult times of Lockdown in Covid-19 crisis. In Hindi it is said, “Ummid pe duniya kayam hai”. A well-known Hindi Poet,Dushyant Kumar write in his poem, “ Kaun Kehta hai ki Aasmaan mein Surag Ho Nahi Sakta, Bas Aap Ek Pathar Ao Tabiyat Se Uchhalo”. To be honest to this, many writers have attempted to give vent to this spirit and human resilience and put the humanity on fire to hit hard against these attacks either natural or unnatural.(1)

A well-known American poet, singer, memoirist and Civil Rights Activist, Maya Angelou was sexually abused at the age of 8 and raped by her mother's boyfriend, a man named Freeman. Angelou after this incident became mute for almost 5 years but she later on was respected as a spokesperson for black people and women and her works have been considered a defence of black culture. She is best known for her series of seven autobiographies which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences. Her first autobiography, “I know Why the Caged Bird Sings” is about her life up to the age of 17 and earned international recognition and acclaim. The spirit of human resilience can well be understood in her thoughts and writing, “All my work, my life, everything

I do is about survival, not just bear awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated". She was the first African American woman to direct a major motion picture, "Down in Delta" in 1998.(1)

The human tryst with epidemics is as old as the hills and the writers over centuries have repeatedly explored it in their prose and verse. They not only just underlined its terrifying power but also the resilience of the human mind to face it. Jayant Mahapatra in his poem, "The abandoned cemetery at Balasore, India" he creates a picture of an atmosphere of timeless ennui that foreshadows an epidemic looming over human kind. The Cholera epidemic, for the poet, embodies a quiet power. The reason is that it moves easily, swiftly through past and present into the growing young, into the final bone. The poem throws light on the insignificance of human life against contagious disease.(2)

We need to remember, while struggling against covid-19, that human fight with epidemics is percolated from the past history as it is as old as humanity itself. Antonine Plague [165 -180](#) AD the plague of Justinine [541 -543](#)AD and the Great Bubonic Plague in Europe [1346 -1353](#) to the Spanish Flu [1918 -20](#) HIV 1981 - and the Asian Flu [1957- 58](#).The Greek writer, Homer first coined the term epidemics. He used it for returning natives in Odyssey. The word was first advocated as a medical term in a treatise by Hyppocrates. It means something which circulates or propagates in a country.(3,4)

Many writers, over centuries, have explained the impact of epidemics in prose and verse. A Nobel winner, the second youngest recipient in history and French philosopher, author and journalist, Albert Camus diagnosed with TB wrote, "the plague was posting sentries at the gates and turning away ships bound for Oran. For contemporary readers, the fictional examination of a pandemic is almost synonymous with Camus' "The Plague". The seminal allegorical work is a critique of "repugnant materialism" as well as a graphic account of human confrontation and co-habitation with death.(4,5)

How truly these words ring today! "Many continued hoping that the epidemic would soon die out and they and their families be spared. Thus, they felt under no obligation to make any change in their habits, as yet. Plague was an unwelcome visitant, bound to take its leave one day as unexpectedly as it had come". As research Camus meticulously studied earlier histories and literature, going back to the Thucydides' account of the typhus of plague that ravaged Athens. Perhaps the most viral and pandemic in human history is the black death of 14th century.It lasted till as late as the early 18th century. The initial outbreak devastated Italy inflicting heavy casualties on Florence and later in France. Boccasio's, "The Decameron" inspired Chaucer. His, "The Canterbury tales" provides an authentic description of the pestilence in Florence. Chaucer's portrayal of plague in the "Pardoner's Tale" was inspired by Boccasio although England had been repeatedly ravaged by plague between

1348 and 1376. Daniel Defoe gives a first-hand account in “A Journal of the Plague year” written by a citizen. More than two centuries later Thomas Gunn describes the AIDS epidemic in his poem, “In Time of Plague”:
 “My thoughts are crowded with death and it draws so oddly on the sexual that I am confused, confused to be attracted by, in effect, my own annihilation”.(3,5)

However, beyond the Euro -Centric portrayal of epidemics, there were also indigenous accounts. Celebrated Hindi poet, Suryakant Tripathi’s memoir, “A Life Misspent” focuses on heart-rending account of the influenza epidemic. It ravaged India during the early years of the 20th century. “I travelled to the river bank in Dalamau and waitedThe Ganga was Swollen with dead bodies. At my in-law’s house I learnt that my wife had passed away. Malaria is an inevitable part of rural life in the works of Bengali writer, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. his Central protagonists are portrayed as altruists they are eager to take on the arduous task of rescuing pandemic afflicted villagers. Interestingly the villagers held the rath of deities responsible for diseases like Plague, Cholera and smallpox and made offerings to Goddesses. In the novels of Tagore, the epidemics are discussed in order to show human resilience and the humanity still prevailed in human. In Chaturanga 1916 when Kolkata is scourged by Plague, Saachish’ compassionate uncle converts his house into an infirmary for the poor but while nursing the patients, succumbs to the disease. Literature, in responding to epidemics, celebrates the enduring range of human responses, the gamut of feelings that rage against the onslaught of disease and death (“The Hindu”-An article written by Dean of Arts, St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata. We will no doubt see poets and writers chronicle the current difficult times too. The virus Corona bows before good personal hygiene. It is helpful when you take your destiny in your own hands by keeping them sanitized as often as possible. So, let’s defeat this one more attack on human being with the resilience which is well described in Hindi film Meri Jung, “Zindagi Har Kadam Ek Nai Jung Hai, Jeet Jayenge Ham”.(Life is a battle in every walks of life, but human efforts with struggle can win the battle. Surely human efforts by struggle brings its own reward (in turn yield its reward) in the end).(6,7,8)

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