



Teachings from Literature on Pandemics

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Abstract: Literature has been integrated to human life in all good and bad aspects of mankind. It has been teaching as well as preaching us for long back which, in a real sense, has impacted the minds of people and also lead them to think and live in the same way the lives depicted in the worldwide literary texts in different forms i.e. novel, poetry or drama. In this research article, the researcher has attempted to analyze some of the popular literary texts written on epidemics and pandemics that created dreadful scenes all over the world at various times. The researcher has narrated the ideology of the same briefly. The discussion in this article comprises of the teachings from literary texts such as 'The Stand', 'The Plague', 'The Hot Zone' and so on.

Key Words: pandemic, literature, teachings, human approach

Introduction:

"What we learn in time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise."

- Albert Camus

Literature has always tried to indicate us the right directions in life. Stories depicted in literary writings have been teaching us different lessons such as humanity, sensibility, responsibility, generosity and so on. People are always motivated by the readings and the movies based on such texts.

Title of the Study

The researcher has selected the following title to examine and analyze the literary writings on epidemics and pandemics and to derive teachings from such literature with a view to suggest and direct a way to humanity.

"Teachings from Literature written on Pandemics"

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To examine the role of literature in pandemic writings.
- 2) To derive lessons/teachings from the literature on pandemics.
- 3) To recommend safety measures implied from literature.
- 4) To suggest human approach to live better life.

Questions of the Study

1. What is the role of Literature in Pandemic writings?
2. What major lessons literature on pandemics teach us?

3. What safety measures are implied in literature on pandemics?
4. What type of humanity approach to this earth needs to be developed?

Significance of the Study

Literature has always been the mirror of what is happening in the world for many thousand years. It has taught us by arousing questions, thinking, inspiration, righteousness, sense of life and so on. The present study is very much useful in today's scenario in the world. We are living with a deadly virus and so it has become necessary to be aware of some pre-determined conditions for living with it. This study will provide some insights to people, the local authority and the governments for creating more healthy and prosperous environment in near future so as to avoid such dreadful things happen again.

Literature included in the study

In this part, all the books written on epidemics and pandemic are the population of the study. From these, the following writings in literature in English were selected as the sample of my study.

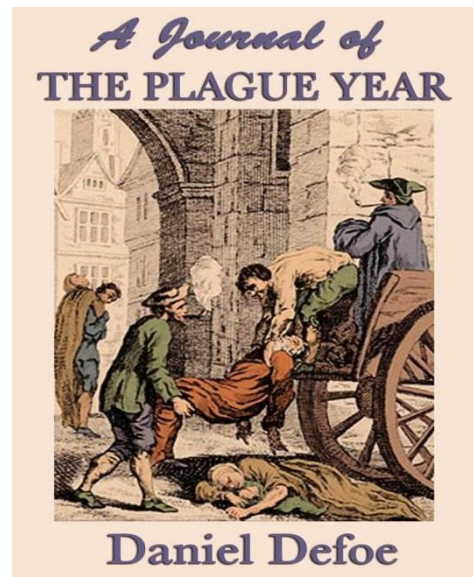
- (1) *A Journal of The Plague Year* (1722) by Daniel Defoe
- (2) *The Plague* (1947) by Albert Camus
- (3) *The Stand* (1978) by Stephen King
- (4) *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary W. Shelley
- (5) *The Hot Zone* (1994) by Preston

Analysis and Interpretation

In this part of the study, a brief detailing of the selected literary texts is narrated in an analytical as well as interpretative method. One can get a simple idea of the theme portrayed in these all time great writings.

A Journal of the Plague Year (1722)

There is scene before our eyes that "an invisible disease covered the life of everyone in the city and the people are frightened and began to leave the city taking with them their belongings. Some are still staying there as they have nowhere to go or in a belief of all will become normal in a few days. The government invokes emergency measures and puts bans on public gathering and event all over the city. People are locked in their homes with their families." It isn't the scene of the recent pandemic of Coronavirus on a city of Wuhan; it is about Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* published in 1722 and the city described above is London where the Plague killed around one-quarter of the population of the city during 1665 to 1666 (in one year). In this report, Defoe had narrated how people can be aware

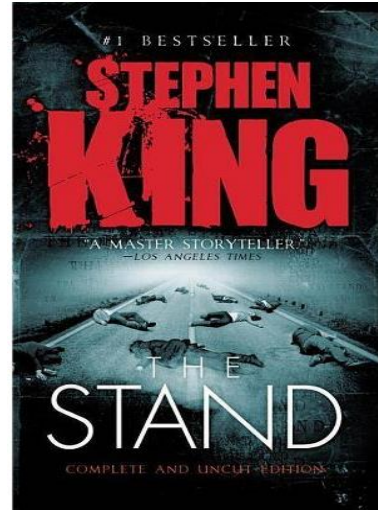


of such dreadful situations if it comes again in future in a different form. People who were seriously infected were forcefully locked with their families in their houses which pushed this pandemic more and created dire conditions. Defoe writes – "It was very sad to reflect how such a person as this, had been a walking destroyer perhaps for a week or a fortnight before that; how he had ruined those that he would have hazarded his life to save, and had been breathing death upon them, even perhaps in his tender kissing and embracings of his own

children.”¹ The major things this journal teach us are – the infected must be kept away from the non-infected people; not going out frequently without an emergent need; and not forgetting to maintain precautions in everyday life. Further, it is observed that no wealth can protect us from any such disease. All the parameters are changed for saving our life.

The Stand

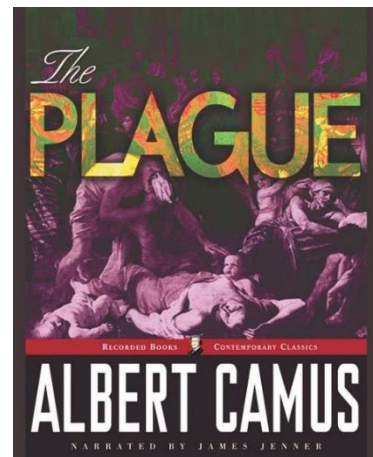
The Stand is popular thrilling novel by Stephen King narrating the events happened after a deadly virus kills 99 percent population of America. Only few thousand people could survive on the continent and are trying to connect with each other. These were the most immune people to survive from the virus named ‘Captain Trips’, ‘Superflue’, ‘Blue Virus’ or ‘tube neck’. The novel begins at this point where two different camps of people conflicting with each other in two different cities: Las Vegas and Boulder. These two sides are characterized as good and evil representing two sides of the same coin. The people of these groups separately wanted to re-build a society. Their priorities of doing are different and having different beliefs for moving ahead to recreate everything is making their fight with each other. *Both are driven by real concern and fear. The difference is only in*



*the priority of their worry.*² King has narrated how human nature with two different aspects affect the humanity. The whole story in the novel depict about people’s predisposition towards good or evil. Human nature is the powerful thing as it can build a new world and also can fight for his beliefs to others.

The Plague

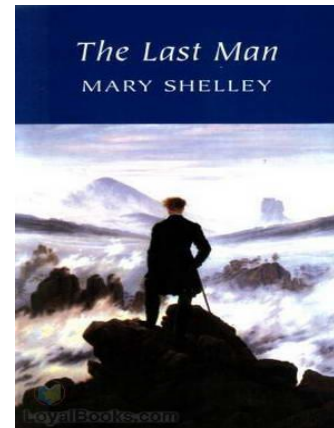
This novel *The Plague* is an English translation of the French Novel *La Peste*, published in 1947, has been one of the most famous works on pandemics so far. It is a fictional story very well narrated by Albert Camus on the pandemic of plague which surrounded the town of Oran in Northern Algeria in 1940. This novel also gave him fame of winning noble prize in 1957. This book is very well adapted to the situations aroused today due to Coronavirus and we can observe the city Wuhan as the new Oran. Camus described pandemic and war as the same and pointed out that both have a surprising nature, *“There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.”* The surprising



entry of the plague is very suitable to the present virus that has created outbreak all over the world. The people are made to rethink about their priorities and modes of living. The story of this novel is seen real now in contemporary situation which has changed the lives, made people habituated of precautions like washing hands, avoiding shake hands and kisses for greetings, maintaining distance of minimum one meter between two people and so on. Actually all these habits were very necessary before too; but its actualization is happening now. Its importance is understood now by the people. Camus had actualized the reality at that time almost a century ago (80 years back from now) and imagined well before these dreadful situations and dire circumstances that are reality now. All such novels and stories are just warnings to humanity. These warnings are not new rather these are more than hundred years old.

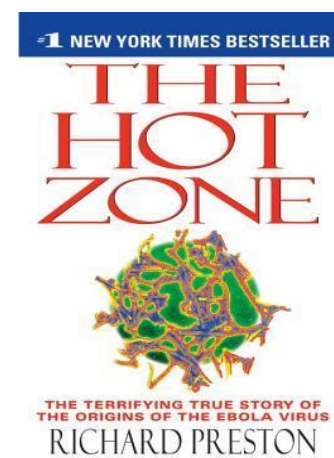
The Last Man

It is an apocalyptic novel depicting the world after plague where only a few people are survived due to good immune and then live maintaining distance from each other. After *Frankenstein*, this is Mary Shelley's significant novel published in 1826. The new vision of future is narrated in the novel. Shelley also described the theory of how immune system can be developed. Further the value of friendship and pets as a source of comfort and stability in times of crisis are depicted in the novel. Mary writes, "Let us live for each other and for happiness; let us seek peace in our dear home, near the inland murmur of streams, and the gracious waving of trees, the beautiful vesture of earth, and sublime pageantry of the skies. Let us leave 'life,' that we may live."



The Hot Zone: The Terrifying True Story of the Origins of the Ebola Virus

This novel narrates true events about an outbreak of the Ebola virus at a monkey facility in Reston, Virginia in the late 1980s. The story of this novel narrates about a new virus called as *Ebola Reston*; which is very much relevant to the current Corona virus as there are no vaccines for the same. Ebola virus the far more dangerous than AIDS as it spreads fast. Preston writes, "Viruses are molecular sharks, a motive without a mind. Compact, hard, logical, totally selfish, the virus is dedicated to making copies of itself, which it can on occasion with radiant speed." This book was written during the time of AIDS crisis in which Preston describes how U S Army operation wiping out the whole colony housed with the African monkeys. The story of the novel also became a base for the movie *Outbreak* (1995).



Teachings Derived

What literature has taught us through such great writings is better pointed out here:

1. Literature has worked as a path way of life to the society; by following which people can build better living system in the surroundings.
2. Are we ready for the next epidemic turning out to be pandemic? We have to learn from past experiences and history. Only then humanity will survive.
3. It is the time to *rise above by ourselves* which Camus has pointed out. Man has to dissect the crises and move ahead.
4. Change is the important aspect of life; and after every calamity a new lesson is learnt by humanity to push a new beginning. Mankind has to understand that new opportunities for improvement have been opened by the almighty God.
5. Voluntary Isolation or quarantine in houses of the infected; which will prevent the infection spreading into the surrounding communities.
6. The people who look well and healthy from first insight can be more dangerous as the virus is not observed into them as Defoe has narrated in his book. It is quite correlated to Covid 19 recently.

7. Another thing we observe is *to contain the contagion* inside one room by providing necessities. This humanity approach was not there at the time of *London Plague* in 1665 as Defoe narrated.
8. Further one should not be desperate for relying and taking false treatments in hurry in order to protect himself
9. Human sensibility must be put in practice. People who are wealthy need to be generous to poor in any form of charity during this pandemic. Moral responsibility should be accepted as well as put in implementation.
10. For Governments, the only responsibility of saving people is to create scope of surviving for them and to put medical services fully on for all. Politics must be kept aside and people's safety must come. It must avoid those biological experiments that can be harmful or may be misused for terrorism.

Conclusion

Thus, the stories narrated in various literary works so far during the last seven to eight hundred years have warned humanity of surprising destruction. All the time, human being became helpless in front of such viruses whether it was at the time of *Black Death* in Europe in Middle ages, the bubonic *Plague* in London in 1665, *Influenza* or *Spanish Flue* in 1918 or it is now the contemporary Corona Virus (CoViD 19). All the money and technology also are in vain. Only precautions like social distancing and health awareness have helped and prevented the viruses from expansion. The only lesson we can learn from the literature on pandemics is to be aware of the birth places of such dangerous viruses; whether it is the biological labs in developed countries, the animal markets, non-veg markets or the reactions happening after atom bomb experiments.

*"Each of us has the plague within him;
no one, no one on earth is free from it." - Camus*

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