



CORONA VIRUS AS A VAMPIRE TO THE HUMAN RACE

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ABSTRACT

The story of the progress and evolution of human has been an unending episode. From being the hunter-gatherer in the pre-historic times to the modern techno-savvy man, this journey has been remarkably significant. Human beings have travelled a long way to mark themselves as the most prominent species on this earth. This entire process of human advancement has been documented since ancient times and can be well understood by going through the pages of literary texts. The literary treasures hold in themselves the mesmerizing accounts of the development of human civilization and culture. They help us to walk back in time and develop better understanding and appreciation of the past. It is enthralling to witness how the great civilizations like that of the Harappa and the Mesopotamia flourished but got eroded due to natural calamities and disasters. With the changes in the human society, literature too has evolved. It is very true to say that literature acts as the mirror to the society. The novels, poems and literary texts belonging to a particular period gives one a clear picture of the culture, society, norms and beliefs of that period. The authors, poets and literature experts pour their heart out to artistically portray the customs, culture, rituals and society of the era to which they belong. We also find the glimpses of the societies through the literature of a particular period. A society is not only about the individuals living together, instead it is an amalgamation of the material objects, culture, beliefs, traditions as well as the resources available. Innumerable human societies have been formed and wiped out on this earth since time immemorial. Natural factors like floods, droughts, pandemic and other natural calamities had played a major role in the extinction and loss of many such human settings and dynasties. In the present world of growing globalization and mass media, the world wars and other disasters have made the human life vulnerable. Literature today mostly focusses on the individualities of human beings. This current covid pandemic has created a vacuum in the lives of people. It feels as if people have forgotten the eagerness and jest to strike conversations and communicate with one another. Literature too has suffered from an immense lack of motivation and creativity. It has developed a situation of creative blockage in the present era. It seems as if the past few years of covid crisis and lockdown has shunted our personalities and made us morose and dull. It has put forward a haunting shadow like that of a vampire over the entire humanity. It appears as though the covid vampire algae is going to endanger the human race sucking its blood and peace.

Keywords:

Corona, pandemic, vampire, pessimism, disaster, human-beings, threat, demon, species, literature, scientific advancement, death, endanger

Review of Literature:

From wars to plagues or any other natural or man-made disaster; literature has absorbed all the traumas and converted them into literary masterpieces. American author, Jodi Picoult has put her imaginative foot forward and turned the entire pandemic into a fictional novel, “*Wish You Were Here*”. She declares that she found the entire process of compiling this pandemic fiction a therapeutic one during disturbing times. Author Gary Shteyngart too fictionalized the pandemic into the novel, “*Our Country Friends*”. The novel is about eight friends who gather in a distant house during the onset of the corona crisis. Indian author Amitava Kumar in his recently published novel, “*A Time Outside This Time*”, tells the story of an Indian American author at an artists’ retreat trying to figure out the constant media vigilance and the relentless virus. Other than these recent releases, many books have been written centering around pandemics, zombies or supernatural elements, such as, Michael Crichton’s *The Andromeda Strain* (1969), Stephen King’s *Doubleday* (1978) and Albert Camus’ classic *The Plague* (1947).

The Fight for Life in the Corona backdrop continues...

The famous naturalist and biologist Charles Darwin in his theory of natural selection had put forward the theory of evolution of species on the earth. Here, he rightly pointed out that in this world with finite resources, only the fittest one can survive. True to his research, human beings have evolved as the smartest and among the most intelligent creatures dwelling across the earth today. With their unparalleled presence of mind and wisdom, they have dominated the entire earth with its millions of species of flora and fauna. From ape-like primates inhabiting trees to upright walking humans, the story of human evolution has travelled a long way. Human civilizations thrived through collective cooperation and experiments to make life easier. These human societies’ further advanced through scientific and technological advancement. Human beings have been able to explore every facet of this earth and learnt to utilize the resources to their optimum. Today, human beings rule the planet and control all other living beings around them.

However, time and again the progress of humans have been hindered by several threatening conditions. Some factors such as climate change, global warming and pollution; arise as the byproduct of rapid industrial and technological advancement and can be controlled up to some extent by human efforts and conscience. Whereas, there have been several unforeseen threats to the human society too, some of these threats surfaced in the form of deadly diseases caused by microscopic microorganisms and later turning into pandemics affecting the world health. These pandemics have caused steep decline in the world population and even countries with the best medical facilities could take no precautionary measures to decrease casualties.

Today, the world is facing the crisis named Covid-19 which is an extremely infectious and communicable disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. When the first case of corona virus was recorded in 2019, no body had thought that soon it would turn into such a life-threatening disaster. As per the report of the World Health Organization (WHO), as of May 28th,2021, more than 168,599,045 people all around the world have been contracted with the virus and it has claimed the life of around 3,507,377 people globally. There is not a single individual left on this planet whose life has not been affected by this virus directly or indirectly. This has not been first time when the world has faced such an alarming danger. Since 1900, the world has faced four major pandemics causing millions of deaths. In 1918, the Spanish flu turned into one of the deadliest pandemics of the century. Caused by H1N1 virus, this disease wiped out one-third of the entire world population in a span of few years. Later, the 1957 Asian flu, the 1968 Hong Kong flu and the 2009 H1N1 Swine flu proved to be severely life-threatening calamities.

It is true to say that humans with their scientific and medicinal achievements have been able to deal with all the challenges successfully, yet, at present the threat caused by the rapidly mutating corona virus has brought the life of the entire world to a standstill. It is beyond doubt that few years back no one would have believed in something called a “*lockdown*”. But today it is the bitter truth of the humanity. We all with our daily life chores and social commitments have been so busy that nobody had ever thought that a virus could create such a havoc. Stories of superheroes with their unimaginable superpowers; saving the world from the deadly viruses have been parts of fictional literature and movies. It was just impossible to think that it is a reality

that a microorganism can turn the world economy upside down and is continuing to do so. It has forced the entire society to shun its contact from the world and to live inside closed doors. Today people are afraid of social proximity and contact. Battling the virus for the last three years have left people fatigued. There is a sense of collective quietness in the entire society. The loss of near and dear ones who have contracted the virus have left a feeling of numbness and fear. It reminds one of the times when stories of “*the walking dead*” exclusively feeding on human blood; circulated around many cultures such as Mesopotamia, ancient India, Serbia, eastern Europe and Rome. In the Indian folklores too, we can easily trace the existence of demons and spirits. The belief in the existence of such a dreadful creature has persisted for centuries in many countries around the world. These creatures were commonly named as “*vampires*” and were considered one of the deadliest being roaming around, ambushing and killing innocent victims.

Though, it may sound absurd but looking closely we can easily find many similarities between the legends of vampires and the present-day corona virus. Both have wreaked havoc to the human society. If we look back to trace the origin of vampire, we must delve deeper in the ancient folklores and beliefs of people as well as literature. Today, vampires are considered as mythical creatures who were believed to roam at night searching for potential preys to quench their thirst of blood. It was said that their powers were weakened under the sun, and direct exposure to sunlight burnt them. They slept in coffins and had sharp fangs. They could even morph themselves to bats or wolves. As far as their appearance is concerned, literary sources document vampires as attractive and seductive beings with supreme physical strength. Vampire lore initially thrived during the middle Ages in Eastern Europe when the plague epidemic was on rage. Thousands of people died, and entire towns were decimated. People died with bleeding mouth and coughing blood. Ignorant village people, without any relevant medical explanations thought it to be a sign of vampirism. Any unknown disease with an uncommon symptom was feared to be caused by supernatural powers. When villagers tried to decipher the causes of the mysterious deaths, they dug up graves to find the corpses looking quite fresh and alive. The dead bodies looked bloated with longer toenails and hair as well as blood leaking from the sides of their mouths. This terrorized the people and affirmed their belief on vampires. It was being said that these corpses were haunted and feasted on the blood of cattle and people nearby. To get rid of this unholy reanimation of dead bodies, practices such as staking the dead to the coffins, beheading and burning of dead bodies became common. During that period the science behind all these natural phenomena were unknown and rumors travelled all over.

India too has its own share of vampire legends in the form of ghouls, *bhutas* and *pretas*. The people who died untimely were thought to be possessed by evil spirits turning them into blood-sucking monsters. Many such tales were included in tales of *Jatak-kathas* and *Kathasaritsagara*. The story of the enduring *Betal* hanging around the neck of *King Vikramaditya* during his nightly quests is one of them. Their name and attributes might differ from culture to culture, but the basic notion of vampires remained the same. They were malevolent revenants sucking the vital life force away from victims, either killing them or converting them too as vampires. Whenever vampire sightings were recorded at a place, it caused public hysteria. Families migrated to safe destinations and small children were heavily guarded. Based on these local superstitions, many writers too tried their hands on vampire-fiction, adding their own elements to each of their novels. Some of the widely read works of vampire-fiction include, Polidori’s “*The Vampyre*”, the gothic novel “*Carmilla*” and the vampire classic Bram Stoker’s “*Dracula*”. Vampire themed novels gained enormous public response and created a cult for itself among other gothic novels. Readers immensely enjoyed the vivid descriptions of vampires and each writer kept on adding new features and attributes to the old vampire myth. However, modern science has completely rejected the existence of such a horrifying creature but still the image of the demonic vampire creeps in our dreams as nightmares.

If we could recall a few years back to the corona free world and imagine the present scenario, it would just be like reading a science-fiction novel. Haven’t all sci-fi lovers read somewhere or the other of flabbergasting stories of virus attacks to end the human civilization? The present situation of the rapidly spreading corona virus is quite terrifying. Just like the vampires from the novels, the corona virus keeps on switching its appearance whenever it is thought that we have somehow gained control on the situation. The present variants

of the Covid virus have undergone rapid transformations and made themselves resistant to the vaccines developed to curb the pandemic. Each wave of the Covid infection has turned out to be much more transmutable and fatal for the humankind. The plethora of written records on vampires too suggest that it was very difficult to get rid of a vampire. It could always bounce back using unknown as well as unique powers. According to the old Slavic beliefs, the ancient vampires were neither shiny nor attractive. They even lacked precision and speed. They were just the cause of diseases and ill-omens. In simpler words, they were terrifying monsters lacking any moral or humanly qualities. But the vampires described by Bram Stoker in *Dracula* and Stephenie Meyer in her *The Twilight Saga* were unimaginably powerful and had several secret powers too. These authors made the vampire a multi-dimensional personality. In earlier times, when the vampire mania was at peak, people feared to leave their families alone. In a similar manner, the corona virus has made a dramatic impact in the daily life of people. The lockdowns have left the evergreen bustling towns and cities look lifeless and eerie. Gatherings and festivities lack the glory without joyful banter and raucous laughter. The lack of enthusiasm and internal subjectivity have disturbed the mental equilibrium of people.

Apart from just being life-threatening, the virus has posed several other complications for humans too, especially those belonging to the downtrodden communities. It was a harsh reality check for many countries who claimed to have made sufficient arrangements for its poor. The socio-economic conditions crumbled under the burden of months long lockdown. The day-to-day earners and small industries badly collapsed leaving thousands of people jobless. This resulted in huge migration. Having lost their means of survival, people travelled long distances from cities towards their villages to their families. Alike was the situation when the vampire legends roamed in old villages. To ensure the safety of their loved ones, people migrated to different places in search of a secured harbor.

When the entire world welcomed the beginning of the new decade with revelry and celebrations in the early 2020, nobody could have predicted that the dawn of the decade would bring with itself such an impending disaster and devastation confining people to their homes surrounded by clouds of pessimism. Parents lost their children, partners bereaved in the loss of their loved ones and countless children were left orphans. People lost their livelihood and left struggling to meet the ends. There was a situation of hopelessness and panic. This pessimism had penetrated so deeper in the mindset of people that it even created a literary void. We all know that literary temperament needs peace and creativity. As described in the words of the greatest poets of all times, William Wordsworth, "*Poetry is the spontaneous flow of powerful emotions collected at tranquility.*" In this complicated world, every single human is looking for a sense of harmony and peace within themselves. This feeling motivates us to move forward and build a better future. But the corona pandemic engulfed the world under the veil of uncertainty and hopelessness. Social media, news reports or medical surveys all added to build up the fear and anxiety. Somehow that year ended with a sigh of relief as the number of corona cases reduced considerably and intense medical research led to the advent of Covid vaccines. But this happiness was temporary. The fresh year 2022, again began with the surge of cases and witnessed a more terrifying state of corona with higher mortality rates. The increased economic burden, social isolation, misinformation and loneliness have made people mentally perplexed and disturbed.

Again, the present year began with the ominous warnings of the third wave of the pandemic. The growing hope and optimism in the worldwide efforts of mass immunization is shaken by the recurrence of corona cases. Indeed, the corona pandemic has turned up as a real demonic vampire for the mankind. It has sucked the life force out of everyone. People have lost the urge to learn new skills or gather new experiences. The same fears and concerns regarding the virus are playing on loop, by repeating themselves over and over again with minor differences. By the time people recover from one lockdown, there is another one and it has become a cyclic process. Over the span of few years, this virus has taken a monstrous form with its countless mutated variations but slowly people have started to cope up with the situation and trying to regain the lost essence of life. The two and a half years of defined a new social code or what people call nowadays, "*the new normal*". Literary pieces have started sprouting around the world revolving around the corona crisis known as pandemic literature.

As the proverb goes, every cloud has a silver lining... This time too there will be light at the end of the dark tunnel. Dracula could be killed by putting a cross across its chest, vampires were burned down under sun and spirits and ghosts were controlled by divine interjections. Similarly, one can hope that soon the world would be corona free. Latest scientific studies and observations have already predicted that the future mutants of the virus would be weaker compared to the early or present variants and soon the world will learn to live with corona. We, the humans can adapt ourselves in difficult situations. This time too shall pass. With the return of corona-free days, humans will again bounce back in life with double vigor and enthusiasm.

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