
English Poetry in the Time of Covid-19**SWETA GOUR^{1*}, ANJALI GOUR²**^{1,2}NET, NET (JRF), Department of English and Culture Studies, Hooghly Mohsin College(B.U),Hooghly, India**ABSTRACT**

The entire nation is struggling with the havoc of COVID-19 and loosing the peace of mind. The despair and frustration of People has urged the Poets of all over the globe to write at the time of this crisis. Alice Quinn, the long-time Poetry Editor at New Yorker and executive director of the Poetry Society of America along with writers like Joshua Bennett, Billy Collins, Cornelius Eady, Deb Garrison, Ada Limon, Amit Majumdar, Kamilah Aisha Moon, Jane Hirshfield, Jenny Xie and Matthew Zapruder, Carl Philips, Evie Shocksley, Yusef Komunyakaa, Grace Schulman, Julia Guez, Julia Alvarez, Major Jackson, Didi Jackson etc. have contributed to the making of a book, a collection of 85 poems named as "Together in a Sudden Strangeness" which is about isolation, grief, boredom, and hope and has been published by Knopf as an e-book on 9th of June, 2020 with a hardcover edition to follow in November. Other Poets like Simon Armitage, Albert Frank Moritz, Derek Mahon, Ayodeji Malcolm Guite and Gabriel Rosenstock have also shown their interest in the contribution. Poetry in the Time of Coronavirus: The Anthology edited by G. A. Cuddy is a dedicated work to Health Professionals. Despite the negative situations of the Pandemic these Poets have shared their common thoughts and views on humanity and concern for society. These Poems make the readers aware of the problems arising by this pandemic. The present paper is an attempt to show the types of poetry written so far in the midst of crisis, separation, agony etc. caused by COVID-19.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Covid-19, Poetry***Introduction**

Literature is always a reflection of the age and it influences a writer, a Poet and a creator immensely. Without having been influenced by the contemporary situation, it is not possible for a writer to create something. Since every pandemic has witnessed a good number of poetry and other literary forms, this period, affected by a new kind of virus, has also paved the way for many writers to exercise their creativity. Poetry is therefore thought to be an adequate medium to depict the pictures of sufferings, agony, pain, loss etc. and to prepare the human race for upcoming challenges in the "New normal situation". An average number of pamphlets, journals, magazines and Research papers have been published since the upheaval caused by this pandemic has shaken the lives of all. There is simplicity in these poems and they are inspiring and appealing too. Many words which have already been used in English Literature are now revised in this time, the most commonly used terms are Quarantine, Isolation etc.

The Pandemic which has been spread worldwide is certainly not the first one. Many earlier Poets and writers of English who had struggled with the reverse situation like the current Pandemic atmosphere had come with numerous Literatures. In Homer's Iliad, Greek soldiers died due to Plague at Troy. Various terms like Epidemois has been used to refer to the Greeks who returned from war in Odyssey. Boccaccio's Decameron inspired Chaucer to write about Plague in 'The Canterbury Tales'. The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore, India by Jayanta Mahapatra is a poem on Epidemic Cholera. The Man with Sweats by Thomas Gunn is a collection of poetry which describes AIDS as an Epidemic Plague.

The Poetry of the Post Covid Period is inspired by the new social awareness that comes in with the spreading of the disease Covid-19 all over the world. The Covid has hit all

the sections of the society. Poverty, misery and economic insecurities are almost universal, and lay bare the hollowness of the existing social and economic set-up. The Poetry of the Covid-19 is yoked to the task of replacing the decayed social order with a healthier one.

The Poets of the Covid -19 period are all rational and mindful despite of the continuous conflict between Superstition and Science, and they all believe, more or less for the well-being of humanity. It is the belief of these poets that awareness through Poetry might bring some consciousness among people.

Methodology

In order to collect and understand the poems written during Covid-19 period, secondary sources are used. The study is exclusively based on secondary data. Information collected from the various websites and blogs are extensively used.

Joshua Bennett, the author of sobbing School has reflected through his Dad Poem(Ultrasound#2) about the loss of his grandmother whose funeral he could not attend in person though virtually which has become quite usual at this time of Pandemic for anyone. With the line referred to his son, he hopes for his birth in a safer world, free from all calamities [1].

".....her youngest descendant born into freedom, our littlest burden-lifter, worldbeater, avant-garde percussionist swinging darkness into song."

Corona Diary by Cornelius Eady, an American writer focusing on the societal problems which is dividing people into two, where on one side one would be privileged, on the other one has to suffer, yet he hopes for the prosper future.

“The buds emerge, on time, For their brief duty. The poem longs to be a filter, but In floats Spring’s Insistence. We wait.”

Simon Armitage, the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom has addressed a poem Lockdown, published in “The Guardian” on the Pandemic Crisis. His Lockdown captures the outbreak of bubonic plague in Eyam in the 17th century, when a bale of cloth from London brought fleas carrying the plague to the Derbyshire village. There is the reference of a boundary stone, on which holes are there and the quarantined villagers are paying for provisions from outside, and then cleaning those coins with vinegars. The poem also focuses on the love from a distance between a boy and a girl. Poetry is “by definition consoling” because “it often asks us just to focus and think and be contemplative” said Armitage [2].

“The Boundary Stone,
That cock-eyed dice with its six dark holes,
Thimbles brimming with vinegar wine

Which brought to mind the sorry story
of Emmott Syddall and Rowland Torre,
Star-crossed lovers on either side
of the quarantine line”.

Jane Hirshfield, is the author of eight collections of Poetry, including her ninth collection, Ledger, where she shared her views on life and death and her concern for environmental degradation. Through her work Ledger, she summons us to understand our responsibility towards refugees, justice and climate. Hirshfield herself says “In unpredictable times, Poetry can offer much needed reassurance”[3].

Amit Majumdar, the American Novelist and Poet, who is a practicing Physician and from his new collections of poem sequence, Antiviral Cocktail: A Sequence, it is clear that he is deeply moved by the current Pandemic situation. In his poem called Body Armor, the problems the health workers are facing due to lack of protective gears have been highlighted.

“We make our own masks: sand
Dollars
tied behind the head with Kite
string”.

Similarly, his poem An American Nurse Foresees Her Death, ponders over the present condition of Nurses. The poet’s sister is also physician who currently runs HIV clinics in the south side of Chicago and for her, the poet is very much concerned and it has also been reflected in this poem. Here he has shown how nurses are caring for the patients but are themselves separated from their family members in doing their service. Time to time, they remind their family their members to be safe and secure at home. They serve boldly without any fear, though they are accustomed to harm their lives in order to serve others.

“The enemy wants to grant me days
Of rest,

A plague of Crows by the same poet describes the hastily atmosphere where nothing is normal. The term

“Corvid” has been used in the negative sense and in some instances it reflects the idea of COVID with which the entire nation is battling. Here, the poet has juxtaposed the bird Corvid with the term Covid.

“Corvids nesting in the
Breast, the breath,
Summering at every blood warm
Birdbath they find”.

In Purgatory, the poet compares the quarantine situation to Hell by referring to Dante’s Inferno. He has explained the entire process of spreading of this disease in a poetic form and gives literary touch and sketching demarcation line between fear and hope. In many works April is the month of happiness and rebirth such as in Geoffrey Chaucer’s but here the Poet refers the month as cruelest month. A sense of Optimism is clearly revealed in this poem.

“But if this
Is purgatory, that means?
There’s a heaven just ahead”.

The American Poet Ada Limon’s “The End of Poetry” is also remarkable at this time of crisis. During an interview the poet herself has said that her whole sense of life has been shifted. It is pertinent from the lines of her poem:-

“I am human, enough I am alone and I am desperate”.

Matthew Zapruder, an American poet whose collection of Poems Father’s Day deals with his personal experience as a father and a son.

Julia Alvarez, a Dominican-American Poem “How will This Pandemic Affect Poetry?”, presents her idea about the importance of poetry. She poses a question to the readers about the influence of poems. She believes that Poetry has the power to act like a medicine but she wants to hear this from the readers [4].

“Will it help build up antibodies against
Indifference?”

Julia Guez, who herself has recovered from the Pandemic has included a Poem in her collection “If indeed I am Ill, Brother”.

Didi Jackson’s book of Poetry, “Moon Jar”, focuses on her personal life due to the loss of her husband who committed suicide earlier. She neglects this grief as nothing in front of this terrible Pandemic. In one of her interviews, she tells – “Life continues. And I’ve noticed that, even in the pandemic.....as we all have to get up, get dressed and get on with it....”[5].

Major Jackson in his poetry “Invocation”, hoped for the better time, when everything would be normal.

“We want the father in the park running
Behind a child pedalling into her future”

The poet Laureate of Toronto, A F Moritz has described the ongoing atmosphere of serious crisis in his verse. According to him “this has afflicted everybody”. His poem Thoughts in Time of Plague deals with the cry of the Pandemic and also gives the scenario of the dead:-[6]

“When we set out, we knew
Many would die on the way”.

Derek Mahon, an Irish Poet, recited his poem “Everything is Going to Be Alright” reassuring the betterment in coming future.

“I lie here in a riot of Sunlight
Watching the day break and the
Clouds flying.
Everything is going to be all right”.

Ayodeji Malcolm Guite’s poem, Easter 2020, pointing to the different Easter Festival at this time, where everyone is locked. He urges the readers to find the presence of God in different places as he is present everywhere now.

“And where is Jesus, this strange EasterDay?
Not lost in our Churches, anymore”.

The contributions of the Poets like Carl Philips, Evie Shockley, Yusef Komunyakaa, Grace Schulman are of immense importance.

Billy Collins, one of America’s best known poets has written a poem called A Sight.

Kamila Aisha Moon has also contributed in the collection “Together in Strangeness”. Her poem, Watching a woman on the Mioi Express is a remarkable work.

Jenny Xie, an American Poet, received Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Literature. Her remarkable Poems are In Search of, No Exit, Indifference, Arrest Granta.

Poetry in the Time of Coronavirus: The Anthology edited by G. A. Cuddy is a tribute to all of the Healthcare Professionals for their continuous effort of treating the virus.

There are more poems as well dealing with similar issues such as -13th Balloon :A poem by Mark Bibbins, Post-Colonial Love Poem: Poems by Natalie Diaz, In the Lateness of the world by Carolyn Forché, Contemporary American by John Murillo, Seeing the Body :Poems by Rachel Eliza Griffiths, For Now by James Richardson, Guillotine: Poems by Eduardo C. Corral, Here is the Sweet Hand: Poems by Francine J. Harris, Underworld Lit by Srikanth Reddy, Blizzard: Poems by Henri Cole, Music for the Dead and Resurrected: Poems by Valzhyna Mort.

Conclusion

The paper focuses on the Poetry written during Covid-19 Pandemic .Though a lot of Poems have been written so far, only some of them have been selected .The Poets have a deeper insight into humanity. This gives rise to human sensibility with the current need for every readers and audience. The Poems suggest the immediate attention towards a contradictory focus on Present and Future, Social and Environmental, Hope and Loss, Life and Death. It is an attempt to give these Poets their due credit, the value of the writing amidst such crisis. The present paper pens the avenue for further study and researches.

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