

The Healing Effects of Literature During Pandemic COVID-19

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The unwanted entry of this villainous virus captioned as COVID-19 or corona virus disease 2019 in our world has resulted not only in physical damage but also in psychological damage of human mind. The physical damage is documented on daily basis and presented by the media on regular basis but the bigger one, the psychological damage of human mind still remains undocumented. Even, it is difficult to find a yardstick which can measure this psychological damage of human mind. This absence of documentation does not mean the absence of psychological damage in terms of restlessness, anxiety, fear, alienation or isolation, threat, insecurity, phobias and manias and the queue may go on and on. This malady (psychological damage) was in need of remedy (heal or cure) and literature undoubtedly acted as panacea (cure for all the diseases) during this tough time of pandemic.

The books or texts of literature were the real source of quality time during this imposed quarantine. The psychological damage of human mind can be easily managed by the power and presence of literature in a daily routine of human life. The world is still waiting for vaccine to control and cure the physical damage done by COVID-19 but the good news is that – literature is the available vaccine to control and cure psychological damage. The famous abbreviation: SMS – Sanitizer, Mask, and Social Distancing may keep the dangerous virus away but what about the psychological damage which cannot be controlled by SMS and therefore indeed there is the need of reading good literature.

Happiness is the key to unlock the human mind in order to provide freedom from the problems like restlessness, uneasiness, irritation, frustration, agitation, alienation or isolation. And this happiness is available in the inspiring and illuminating lines from the varied world of literature. There is huge stock of literary lines available in literature which will surely have the healing effect on human mind during this poignant and pathetic pandemic. Now, let us highlight the major psychological damages on human mind and the ways to overcome these damages by the healing effects of literary lines written by the literary legends of literature.

THE FIRST PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE AND THE HEALING EFFECT OF LITERATURE: TRANSFORMATION FROM PURPOSELESSNESS OF HUMAN LIFE TO PURPOSEFULNESS IN HUMAN LIFE

This pandemic has damaged human mind in regard to the purposelessness in life. This imposed isolation or alienation forced the human mind to retrospect the meaning in his or her

life. The past was past, present in trouble and uncertain future resulted in meaninglessness in life. In this manner, the mind was hijacked by negativity or pessimism but here comes the healing effect in the lines written by the legendary William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

The entire world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. (Act II Scene VII lines 139 – 143)

In the above lines, Shakespeare has beautifully explained the meaning of human life. The world is a stage and human beings are just players. We all are born to play our part in different roles and responsibilities. We act in our own capacities and this quarantine time is also testing our capacity to conquer this tough time. It is well known to all of us that – when going gets tough, tough gets going. So, we have to play the part of warrior and fight against this virus not physically but psychologically and this 'fighting spirit' will provide purpose in life. Hence, the lively lines of Shakespeare will have the power to transform purposelessness of human life into purposefulness in human life.

THE SECOND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE AND THE HEALING EFFECT OF LITERATURE: IDENTITY LOST AND IDENTITY REGAINED

During this lockdown period, there was a great loss in terms of human identity. In the pre-pandemic days, human mind was occupied with work and the daily routine was set. An individual had an identity as a businessman, entrepreneur, salaried person, and skilled labour etc. but during lockdown he or she was confined in the four walls of room and this confinement was not less than a solitary confinement whereby the individual started feeling the problem of identity crisis. He or she was lost in his or her own world of solitude and this state can be best explained through the lines of "The Waste Land" (1922) composed by T S Eliot, "I think we are in rats' alley/ where the dead men lost their bones" (lines 115 – 116).

The human mind felt as if it is in the house of mouse and completely lost in separation from society. This loss of personal and professional identity created complications and therefore the human mind started to find the ways to regain the lost identity. Once again, literature came to rescue the human mind from the shackles of identity crisis. The lost mind found its identity in the following lines of *Gitanjali*'s poem no 35 by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;/ Where knowledge is free;/Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;/Where words come out from the depth of truth" (lines 1 – 4).

The above lines are loaded with energy, enthusiasm and enchantment. By reading such lines, an individual may feel motivated and conquer the fear factor. The human mind takes the

shelter of knowledge and breaks the walls of lockdown to regain the lost identity. Hence, “identity lost” due to lockdown but more importantly “identity regained” by literature.

THE THIRD PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE AND THE HEALING EFFECT OF LITERATURE: JOURNEY FROM DISTRESS, DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISILLUSIONMENT TO DELIGHT

This sudden calamity in the name of COVID-19 or corona virus disease 2019 occupied the human mind with distress, disappointment and disillusionment. This virus not only entered in human body (physically) but also in human mind (psychologically) and created a vacuum or void resulting in absolute depression. The human mind lost the sense of belongingness and ownership towards self. The colourful life started fading and was just on the verge of colourlessness and then again literature came to release the burden of depression. The following lines by the monumental Satan in *Paradise Lost Book I* (1667) by John Milton (1608 – 1674) had the power to make the dead man alive:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome? (lines 105 – 109)
Fall'n Cherube, to be weak is miserable
Doing or Suffering: (lines 157 – 158)

In the above quoted lines, the colossal Satan teaches the principle of “will power” that can transform depression into delight. The mind which was occupied by the depression during lockdown found a great sigh of relief by reading such eloquent lines which conveys a great message that ‘will’ can kill all the ills. In better words, one should never ever surrender before the thunder and should never feel weak if he or she wishes to reach the peak of delight in life. It is always better to do than to suffer as we are not born to suffer rather we are born to enjoy every moment of life. Likewise, the same temperament of confidence and commitment is also available in the concluding lines of the famous poem “Ulysses” by the Victorian Legend Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892), “Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are; / One equal temper of heroic hearts,/Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” (lines 69 – 72)

As everything comes with an expiry date and the same will be applicable to this cruel and callous COVID – 19 also therefore we need to change the mentality because all the problems are temporal and we should not believe in setback and rather focus on comeback because after a sad day there is a glad day.

In nutshell, the entire idea is to project the curative power of literature during this pandemic and to highlight the workable ways to manage the psychological damage done by this undesirable virus. The textual lines from distinguished literary texts are not merely lines but a kind of vaccine to clean the dirt of mind in order to make the human mind fertile. This fertility of mind will definitely result in creativity and innovation and this temperament of creativity will regain the happiness for one and all.

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