

Myriad Shades of Love in the Challenging Times of Covid-19

Pandemic

Arpita Sardar

Abstract

Several pandemics such as The Black Death, Spanish Flu, Russian Flu, The Great Plague of London, SARS etc. have hit hard in the history of human civilization. In the present scenario, every section of the society is suffering from the devastating financial and psychological impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. No matter how privileged or marginalized people are, they are bound to experience the panic of living with the virus. The article analyses the effects of the deadly virus on human lives and it also examines how people are dealing with it in their own way.

Keywords: Pandemic, Panic, Fear, Hope, Survival.

Since early March 2020, the world has been finding himself in the grip of a deadly disease Covid-19. With the advent the virus outbreak, it has been observed that the pandemic has affected familial relationships to a great extent. As the whole world is hit by the unprecedented global crisis, it has transformed human relationships in various contexts. It is important to fathom the impacts of the crisis on human lives based on three crucial factors i.e. money,

distance and disease. This article is an attempt to examine behavioural patterns of individuals not just with other human beings but also with the natural world as a whole as an outcome of a large-scale pandemic.

In order to curb the proliferation of the deadly virus, many countries have cancelled social gatherings, closed educational institutions, and postponed travelling. Furthermore, a complete lockdown has also been imposed by many countries. It has forced people to stay indoors paving way for them to spend time with family. Many people feel more connected to their family members than they typically do. Being social animals, people feel the deep drive to connect with each other over the help of technological devices. In some cases, the crisis has brought people closer depending on their emotional vulnerabilities. Couples get an opportunity to stay connected for a longer time. In this difficult time, people emerge as stronger by the dint of the love and care of their loved ones. Some people have expressed that they have got a rare opportunity to celebrate the love they have for each other in the family. Though people are distanced from each other physically, they make it an effort to reach out to their extended families and friends. A little phone call or a WhatsApp message has become an integral part of people's lives. Especially, people who live all alone, they feel connected through the feeling of this renewed commitment. It has also been seen that people with existing vulnerable situations are more prone to the intensification of negative strain in their relationships. For some people, working from home and taking care of the household has considerably exacerbated stress level which has also taken its toll on their personal relationship.

In such anomalous times, it is important to address mental health issues where people are vulnerable to psychological disorder. While the only mission is to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus, social distancing has become one of the most crucial measures that ought to be taken. Now, the problem lies in the fact that social distancing asks for all that is required for mental health. Companionship in the form of physical presence is taken away which might

put some people in relentless ennui and loneliness. We must know how to handle things with maturity. Otherwise, it might affect our temperament and take a toll on our relationships as well. It is to be noted that baneful effects of the outbreak might result in disenfranchisement and marginalisation in a large scale. In this context, it should be remembered that this kind of phenomenon was experienced during the Spanish Flu of 1918 and the Great Depression in the 1930s. Alienation from the close people and exacerbation of mental distress can lead to severe domestic crisis. In these crucial times of pestilence, the concept of individual/community and interest/collective responsibility blurs as compassion takes the forefront.

During the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, millions of people find themselves in a web of economic marginalisation, social upheaval and gender discrimination. While people from elite and upper-middle-class families could enjoy the work-from-home scenario, the lower middle class and working-class people experience no such change in their daily schedule. After the initial complete lockdown of about a fortnight, they are bound to work to feed their families. Different sections of people experience a sense of precarity which has always been a feature of capitalist societies. The idea of precarity once again reminds us of the fact that the world's population lacks stable incomes now and this has resulted in unemployment, financial insecurity, and domestic violence. The current precarity of the working class exacerbates the economic crisis that they have been facing probably since their birth. With precariousness, all the other aspects such as vulnerability, anxiety and stress, feelings of disenfranchisement, and hopelessness affect people severely. Due to the economic recession, not only the working class but the upper middle class and elites also suffer from the feelings of precariousness. So it is clear that precarity is a term reserved for the marginalised, poor and disenfranchised and precariousness can be felt by people irrespective of their class, creed and gender. With the first nationwide lockdown, poor migrant labourers were compelled to leave their place of work because they were not provided with any means of food, shelter and security. Finding no

options left, the migrant labourers decided to walk miles after miles to reach home in the hope of having food. As a matter of fact, there have been inhumanitarian instances where disinfectants were sprayed on the migrant workers. This particular act serves as an indicator of the brutality of the social class system. This incident exposes the mindset with which the proletariat are treated even today. The pandemic hints at the existing problem that the safety and security of the migrant workers have always been neglected by the higher authority. But the economy needs migrant workers' mobility across the country. It can be said that the difficult time of pestilence delineates class distinctions to the core. The age-old system where the poor compete with another poor for limited resources of food and shelter comes to the surface. Because of the complete shutdown of small businesses on the pavements, the hawkers and the vendors face an economic crisis which results in housing insecurities. Unfortunately, the central government's plea 'stay home, stay safe', does not make any difference to the marginalised section of the society. Their priority has always been to find food and shelter. While they are hungry, what else can they think of? Can they be afraid of an unseen deleterious virus?

Cases of domestic violence are on the rise during this difficult time of pestilence. It is increasing not only because people are forced to stay indoors but it has its roots in the economic insecurities and accompanying frustrations. Restlessness for staying at home and financial losses often lead people to resort to anger which ultimately culminates in violence. Various NGOs and other organizations have tried to reach out to oppressed women through the help of technological devices. In this context, it can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to people who were already dealing with hardships. It only aggravates their mental trauma. The fear of contagion of the virus has affected our psyche and has forced us to behave in unexpected ways. To some, the constant news of increasing COVID cases and death tolls have resulted in heightened anxiety and caused a severe impact on their psychological

well being. The fragility and vulnerability of human relationships become more evident than ever. The global crisis has brought us all in a standstill where we are compelled to realise that we are mere puppets in the hands of nature. People who deal with the financial crisis find it difficult to calm their racing pulses.

In India, several occasions are celebrated irrespective of religion, caste and creed. And these festivals bring monetary benefit to a lot of people. But this time, they are facing impoverishment to a great extent. Eventually, this might create a strain on their minds for a lack of financial stability. After five months of dealing with the virus, it is seen that the unprecedented crisis has impacted a lot on the global economy, jeopardising work, livelihood and public health. People, associated with informal occupations, suffered the most. No matter what the honourable prime minister exhorts to various organizations to not cut off pay for their workers, in reality, there is no difference in the lives of the proletariats.

In these challenging times, it is also important to introspect in terms of self-care and self-evaluation. This time has also allowed reconnecting with everything that we have and to value what we already possess. Last few months have been so stressful that sometimes we needed to detach ourselves from the media news and manifest a kind of positivity amidst the fear that gripped the entire world. We can be each other's support system by rendering empathy and care in overcoming the sway of anxiety and panic. Moreover, it is also to be remembered that differently able people need our assistance in this hour of crisis. For example, visually handicapped people get a sense of their surrounding by touching almost everything that comes their way. In these circumstances, this act is completely unimaginable. We can extend our supporting hand to those unfortunate people. The lives of sex workers have been pushed over the edge by social distancing norms since early 2020. This is extremely unfortunate that marginalised communities like sex workers are among the worst hit in the crisis. Many have

resumed work to make ends meet ignoring the fear of contracting the virus. As a matter of fact, hunger is greater than any impending danger that might come in their way.

Since Covid-19 is a highly contagious disease, we need to get ourselves prepared for it, rather panic out of fear. Every other person on this planet seems to have a thought that he/she might be infected with the deadly virus if not infected yet. People who were quite careless regarding the prevention to combat the virus have started to take precautionary measures to escape from the wrath of the disease. It is predicted that more people will be affected by the virus which will create affliction on a broad scale. With the lower rates of economic growth, quality of life is going to be changed for the worse. And this turmoil would impinge on the quality of the relationship that people share with their closed ones, in most of the cases. This pandemic is a reminder to make us think that there is nothing substantial in the enmity that people have for each other. Instead, we should be more compassionate towards other humans because we all are travelling in the same boat. As far as the wrath of nature is concerned, our lives are unpredictable. The Covid-19 pandemic is a cruel reminder of the fact that all humans are fragile. We all are same irrespective of our social class, religion, caste, creed and colour. Despite all our differences, we are simply mere puppets at the hands of nature. A small virus can obliterate everything on the earth. Besides, it is also to be learnt that people are interdependent and one should be more tolerant towards others. We need each other's empathy, support and compassion to survive. With the emerging apocalyptic vision, the history of the world marks another quest for existence of human race.

Works Cited

Baig, Noor. "Love in the Time of a Pandemic." The Times of India. 15 Aug. 2020.

www.epaper.timesgroup.com/Olive/ODN/TimesOfIndia/shared/ShowArticle.aspx?doc=TOIH%2F2020%2F08%2F15&entity=Ar07105&sk=B5C53B23&mode=text#.

Accessed 26 August 2020.

Jayaram, Nivedita, Raghav Mehrotra. "Marooned in the City." Frontline. The Hindu Group of Publications, 24 Apr. 2020. www.frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article31257591.ece. Accessed 20 August 2020.

Trivedi, Divya. "Impact on the Marginalised." Frontline. The Hindu Group of publications, 25 Aug. 2020. Web. www.frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article31248346.ece. Accessed 30 August 2020.

Sikkema, Kelly. "Love in the Time of COVID." The Harvard Gazette, 21 May. 2020. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/multimedia-article/love-in-the-time-of-covid>. Accessed 2 September 2020.

Sridhar, V. "Economic Burden." Frontline. The Hindu Group of Publications, 10 Apr. 2020. www.frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article31129272.ece . Accessed 4 September 2020.

About the Author

Arpita Sardar is a PhD scholar at Department of English, Jadavpur University. She may be contacted at aarpita06@gmail.com.