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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/13261

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/13261>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

STATUS-QUO OF RELIGION AND MEDIA DURING PANDEMIC

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 10 June 2021

Final Accepted: 14 July 2021

Published: August 2021

Abstract

Being a recurring theme in literature and as a genre of same both religion and media have been influenced people over centuries. Having contradictory nature, the impact of both during the horrific times of Covid-19 is significant. Adding trauma to the harsh realities experiencing by the people more than comforting them, both disciplines will be a prime focus in Post-Covid literature. This paper vividly examines the roles played by these mediums and the results they made in days of pandemic. It also scrutinize the association of these two during the pandemic as it is highly critical. Discussing the present and future scenario of the pair in backdrop of its impact on people the paper states that media will prevail and religion will collapse.

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Introduction:-

Literature is a constant medium to depict the lives of mankind embellished in imagination. Whatever the human life offers, whether it is jovial or miserable is always relocated in the pages of literature in both written and oral forms. In short, we can say that literature is human history. The Great Plague of London, the French Revolution, Darwinian Theory, the World Wars, all contributed to the development of literature by rendering certain themes, genres, art forms ... The post-modern twenty first era is experiencing the catastrophic hit of Covid-19 virus, resulting in abject poverty, despair and crisis in every circles of human race. Hence the pandemic which we are encountering will undeniably influence the upcoming literature. Post-Covid literature obviously discusses the trauma and doomed lives of humans from all perspectives.

Literature from its origin debates varied subjects. There are many recurrent themes in literature like love, chivalry, war and one among them is religion. Religion always provides setting, theme, characters and content to English literature from the times of Chaucer. Different genres of literature like fiction and non-fiction has invariably talked through religion in different times in different attitudes. Post-Covid literature will evidently examine the concept of religion as it envelops a new phase. This paper converses the impact of religion over mankind during pandemic and how it will grab a position of its own in Post-Covid literature.

Literature earns genres through ages and innovations. Latest renovation to the literary genre is the media, which can be viewed as an impact of developed technology. In a sense, media has replaced the foremost genres of literature through its visual impacts and sounds replacing words. The influence of media on people during this tremendous period is highly critical. Religion also changed its notions of media and entertainment in this modern era and this shift is also under crucial suspicion. This paper also discusses the impact of media on isolated and anguish people and the profound shift in the attitude of religion towards media.

Religion always played a very significant role in human life for centuries. For some, it is a place for solace, for others it is an ethical system that leads their lives in morals. But for many it is a tool for socializing. All these concepts of religion and faith have been re-evaluated during the pandemic covid-19. Human race is currently undergoing a different experience of isolation and locking them up in this traumatic era. The pandemic has influenced masses in certain magnitude varying physically and mentally.

The controversy between religion and science has been existed from the invention of technology. As it is visible in every field the scenario of covid-19 has also witnessed it. 'Healing' is a term that is prominent to both the fields under study. Religion offers mental healing and science offers physical healing. Pandemic demands both these. Sometimes, these notions are interchanged and converted accordingly to the human mind largely by religious lunatics. 'SMS', a mantra of this period, propagated by medical science in order to prevent the spread was neglected by the religious eccentrics saying that mask is not necessary for them instead God will cover them from the virus. A few days after this iconic statement, this so called eccentric is hospitalized due to the attack of the same virus. It really put forth a prime question religiously – whether man should believe in God's own hands or God's gifted hands.

As already mentioned, religion was an aid for socializing; pandemic had completely destroyed this characteristic. The churches, mosques, temples were shut down for a long span by the governments as a preventive measure. This affected people in varying degrees leading some to loneliness and mental stress but for others, it was a spiritual enlightenment. Lockdown locked people in isolation and despair, as the pandemic hit them hard, people were in a condition of uncertainty and hapless which lead them to faith. They praised God and affirmed his protection over and over and also cried for saving their lives and the lives of their beloveds from the brutal hands of the epidemic. As all the worship places were closed all devotions abated inside the four walls of households. This radical shift influenced mankind differently depending on their age groups.

In the eastern tradition, people over their fifties, the period where they enjoy their retired lives is widely considered as an age of spiritual exploration. India's puranic text 'Vedas' convey this idea which really tells us that how old this concept is. 'Vanaprastha', the third of the four ashramas of human life, of vedic ashram system implies this notion. Literally referring to 'retiring to forest', vanaprastha indicates a deeper level of meaning – spiritual liberation. When we analyse this theory in a psychological level, we can detail that the fear for death and as an act of repentance for the sins they committed in their life and their need for spiritual salvation, all results in their old age spirituality. The pandemic gave them a terrible hit as they miss badly their shrines, from where they usually started their daily routine. To them, this plight added to their mental decay. But in another sense, pandemic gifted them enough and more time to recite their prayers and chant their mantras and to teach the younger generation about the significance of faith. The first wave of pandemic affected strongly on this group of people which also resulted in their strong belief as they strongly believes they are the next.

The next category of people is the youth and the middle aged ones. For them the pandemic is a 'spiritual liberation' – a sense of freedom from the world of religion and spirituality. They don't want to attend the masses on sundays, don't want to visit mosques in friday, don't want to offer the temple praising and the list goes on of many don'ts. The twenty first century is not a period of strong faith. We can see a decline in the faith from the Victorian era in the world history and the situation of two centuries after that is assumable. The relevance of religion and its propaganda again came in discussion in the human mind during this pandemic. As everything is suspended, the priest and leaders of different religion come to the scene and promoted virtual worshipping. With the development of science and innovations at the peak, twenty first century is a ultra-modern world, where all transactions and dealings happens online around the globe, religion also took the same path of virtual platform. By doing so, there are many questions that arise in the young minds – is the religion being commercialized, the question of the essence of religion, is religion a true concept.....This ambiguity rules over the young minds for years has reached its maximum during this dreadful situation. Pandemic had gifted them starvation in every aspects –physical, mental and spiritual and brought them to the verge of existential crisis same as the world wars offered humanity.

The section to which the kingdom of heaven belongs is the other privileged class of this pandemic. Being on home for years is a partial confinement for them. Without social experiments their future is unresolved and the struggles they undergo are unpredictable. They are inwardly freaked out, as their every social interaction possible is transferred to a small –screen, including religious lessons. Their attitude to life and the future of their faith is

dubious as they are not experiencing it and they are spending the most valuable times and learning the life lessons midst of this appalling period.

This pandemic period is viewed as part of apocalypse and as a form of plagues send by the God similar to the ten plagues mentioned in the book of Exodus to challenge the rising mistrust of modern people by some religious preachers. This pandemic period also witnessed the shallow and deep followers in religion; former who was once very active in every rituals, practices and ceremonies of religion had become inactive as the pandemic hits, while latter whose religious roots are in faith, still holds to it and view the life optimistically. But the second group is very limited and close to extinction.

The period of pandemic proposes the significance of religion in the lives of human in an arguable form and as the influence of faith adds to the existential crisis and ambivalence of this time, the theme of religion is predictable in post-covid literature framework. The impact of experiencing religion without its rituals, ceremonies and practices, focusing on its core belief of faith over people is argumentative and will be evident in the forthcoming writings of people from the angle of their viewpoint.

Media is the greatest influence on man in the modern world. Playing multiple roles in the social circle, media surely represents varied things from providing information and aiding governance to being a complete entertainer; the influence of media on people is inevitable. As the days of pandemic restricted people from mingling outside, the only source they depended was the media and it is not an exciting idea in this mechanical world. The lives of people were affected in opposites by the media as same as the religion did. For all the information regarding the pandemic the news and social platforms were ready to provide. Even though the reality shows and serials have stopped their performances, movies were released through OTT platforms, shrinking theatrical experience to a small screen happening, but serving the purpose of entertainment. Governments also choose media as a platform to communicate with people and to eradicate the excess anxiety.

While we are finishing the third wave of this epidemic, and are ready to face many more waves of this horrible plight, the present and future of religion is hideous. As W.B Yeats' concept of gyre is gaining its relevance in this present scenario and the position of religion is pulled down with the least significance.

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart: the centre cannot hold;”