

Digital Poesy on Corona: Peek into Plight, Pain, and Purgation

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to present the corona pandemic in the light of digitally expressed feelings on social media. It tries to understand the different aspects of the pandemic and its reflection in poetic form, which captures the myriad emotions of the people worldwide. Language emerges as a powerful medium to combat the virus. From expression to empowerment, from analysis to awareness, from fear to hope, the poems kindle a light of spontaneous outburst.

Keywords: Corona, Pain, Pandemic, Digital

Introduction

An expression of words, a soulful penning of thoughts, and deep-seated thought-provoking contemplations define poetry. It carries with it seeds of emotional forbearance. Pandemics and epidemics have greatly influenced the literary works, and in the year 2020, this has come to the fore. The corona virus has become viral and so are the poems written on it. Metaphorically, the corona virus has been defined as a 'terrible monster' and a 'bulbous spike', which has a 'fanciful shape' and is 'noxious & lethal which sucks the blood.' Paula Treichler, in *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, observes that an "epidemic is cultural and linguistic as well as biological and biomedical" (qtd. in Nayar). John Donne's term, *Emergent Occasions* (1624) echoes with Geoff Dye's *The Existential Inconvenience of Coronavirus* (March 2020). Edgar Allen Poe's short story, *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), finds a resemblance in the present time of corona pandemic. Rosenberg states: "most epidemics are united in their ability to raise questions of 'volition, responsibility, and susceptibility' (6).

History remains not just a time line, but a graph of images, recreating the memory into a memoir in the present.

Aim

The aim of the paper is to present the corona pandemic expressed in the poetic form available in a digital format. In this digital world, where social media rules, one finds that people belonging to different professions are expressing themselves through words, verse, and prose. An important development is that the corona pandemic has also led to a spurt in new creations and expression of thoughts. The attempt is to study 'insta' poetry and poetry published on various forums and websites, which have delved into the poignancy of the situation.

Paradigm Shift

In the current times, there is a paradigm shift from looking at life as not just a role to be played, but as a mask to be adorned for personal protection. What was once called self-isolation is now proclaimed as self-quarantine or quarantined. The oscillation of feelings, the ugly dance of poverty, the custodial arrest of authority, and the hollow dance

of politics alongside the fearful and panicking virus has led people to question and come out with a heart wrenching flow of words. "The awareness of disorder generates in the human mind a spontaneous ordering response" (Orr 17). Digital medium has become the platform for voicing the unvoiced, and poems have buzzed with satirical expositions and painful renderings to thankful expressions. Poems have served as the medium to escape and transcend the mundane feelings to hope for survival. Orr opines:

In the act of making a poem at least two crucial things have taken place that are different from ordinary life. First, we have shifted the crisis to a bearable distance from us: removed it to the symbolic but vivid world of language. Second, we have actively made and shaped this model of our situation rather than passively endured it as lived experience. (4-5)

Imagination and Reality: A Confluence of Paradoxes

Digitally written poems reflect the pain and the plight of people, ecology, nature and environment, isolation and seclusion, fear and remorse, and the moral and spiritual learning from the catastrophic experiences. The potent rule of a contagious disease has brought out the significance of life and its little pleasures. These poems chronicle the tale of twisting destinies and the overbearing human responses, and traces the pulse of human beings during critical moments. Sameer Khan (2019) has written: "...when a potentially dangerous outbreak appears on the horizon, we give in to those impulses again, this time at the collective, societal level." (37)

Fear, stillness, and human uncertainty are the most recurrent themes of the pandemic writings. Charles Coe, in his poem *Love in the Time of Corona*: (Apologies to Gabriel Garcia Márquez), mentions: "In the days of fever and fear / we keep our distance" and "Until then our cries for human touch / are dispatches from separate battlefields"

(1). Each human body is fighting to survive the greatest war of all times and within them is lingering the passionate desire to kindle the lamp of life again. Lindsay Crudele, in *First Line Second Line*, has poignantly expressed the feeling of timelessness in the sphere of existence. She writes: "Stillness everywhere / until we find another way / calendar pages bury my bare feet" (7). The perplexing interaction of suffering abounds in these poems and this suffering is more at the mental level. Chad Paranteau's *At-Home* distressingly exhibits the grave morbidity. He writes: "Silence speaks loud enough to shake the pillars all exes stand on" and he wonders "if reality or dreams have more ghosts now". Mathew Minicucci's *Nostalgia* is laden with imagery to question the existence as to him "... eyes shut in a sickly-sheeted afternoon is like space flight." (Tonthat 1)

The literature written on pandemic creates an uneasy alertness of the most dreaded word 'DEATH'. The struggle is not for identity, but for survival. The struggle is of placing the disjointed paths into a path that has a direction and can lead to an understanding. Angelica Maria Aguilera echoes the emotions of pain at thinking that death is near and life is precious. In her poem *I Take Notes from My Brother in Prison Quarantine*, she writes: "we speak not knowing how minutes are left on the timecard" (13). The use of ellipsis in her poem suggests the elliptical contracted time of death, which rules the mind and body. Same is expressed by Kim Addonizio in the poem titled *Divine*, as he loquaciously articulates the condition of human beings as in "Denial of pleasure / death before death." The coexistence of pain with hope, realisation with actualisation, and danger with anticipation is evident. Susan Moore, in *Downtown Portland Pre-Pandemic*, says: "Crows that blanket the sky with their voices. The crow inside me that doesn't answer when I call, the crow inside me that never shuts up" (Tonthat 1) has voiced the internal conflict. Crystal Jackson's poem *Ring around the Rosie* articulates the distress: "But all four walls

are creeping near / As the life I had fades into fear". (1)

The title of the poem *We are not in the Same Boat* catches the fancy as it strikingly juxtaposes the condition of the people and the myriad reactions of the same. The poem titled *How to get Home* questions the meaning of home and being at home: "I've heard home makes the man / But which one is my home?" Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell, in *The Apocalypse*, labels her workplace as a "battleground" and regrets that the "trusting hands" which nursed the sick have now become untouchable. Through her poetic expression, she succeeds in creating a war-like image of the present society.

These digitally written poems also tend to be like empowering cries aiming to change the future. Most of the poems lament the loss of freedom, which was taken for granted. The concluding line of Alicia Jo Rabins' poem *Breathing* is "Teach me to breathe", which does not only pen anxiety, but also reflects the most important lesson of life. The Alipore post on Instagram: "I'll remember it as the summer of death / when humanity came alive" sheds light on the paradoxical truth of grim reality. In these digitally written poems, the shift can be seen from individualism to collectivism, from nation to the world, and from a part to the whole of existence. Pandemic has levelled the playing field for all, as the emotions crisscross along the same path.

Though nature is gaining its pristine beauty back, the reality is that people fail to appreciate the naturalness of the nature. Susan Moore's phrase: "The sky grey, blue, then grey again" hints at the change in nature and the mindlessness of the poetess for whom greyness symbolises dull life. The writers seem to draw inspiration from nature as Sally Morgan compares the human beings to squirrels that bury food and a bear that lumbers out of hibernation. Donna Musick Evans's poem *Shelter in this Place* hints at the regenerating beauty of the environment, which seemed to have been endangered by the human species. She

writes: "Wildlife ventures further / while the streets are empty." Brother Richard Hendrick's poem *Lockdown* manifests the positive impact of the virus on society through the lines "The sky is no longer thick with fumes / But blue and grey and clear... The birds are singing again / The sky is clearing" (medhumchat.com July 15, 2020). Manohar Shetty's poem *Quarantine Blues* captures the pathos pervading nations and celebrates the beauty of nature, which gives a message of a new beginning waiting to be unfolded by humanity. He writes: "Into the jetless, noiseless blue / Of the sky or play a timeless.... There is so much time to pause / And reflect – and please don't give in." (scroll.in)

Unity in Calamity

The tone of the poems reverberates with eclectic feelings which waver from pessimism to optimism. These poems express the wrongs of the time and enables humans to learn through experiences. The subtle reality pokes its spikes and leads the people to ponder. It is rightly said: "True poetry survives as singularity, as utterly its own, but always touched too by obligation: by isolation, grief, community, faith and death. Poetry is the human mouth figured as the mouth of a river" (Corcoran 9). Poetry has become a medium to give vent to the suppressed feelings and underlines the need for unity in diversity to combat the lethal virus. Alisha Patel, in her Instapoetry, pens: "Nothing belongs to you alone / Perhaps this will remind you it never did." Yayoi Kusama expresses hope for the future, but she emphatically orders and commands the virus to leave the earth and give the people much needed solace. The poet says: "It is time to seek a hymn of love for our souls...To COVID-19 that stands in our way / I say Disappear from this earth." Laura Fanucci's words ring a sign of moralistic message: "When this is over / may we never again take for granted / a handshake with a stranger", which culminates in a strong sense of acceptance of our egoistic rides and negligence of gratitude. Richard's poem

Lockdown has a spiritual message: “To how big we really are / To how little control we really have / Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now / Today, breathe / Open the windows of your soul.”

Conclusion

Poetry written digitally in the present time is like a representation of moralistic perception of reality and a ‘vehicle of linguistic innovation’. Harish Trivedi writes: “Literature may not explain or fight off things like pandemics even as modern science sometimes can’t, but it does become a source of consolation, a way of sharing our common humanist concerns.” (TOI April 20, 2020)

Similar to the verbal art, digital

poems articulate the ongoing discussions and manage to raise pertinent questions. The personal suffering parallels the universal grief in these poems and the inner state of mind connects with the power of language, which has broken the barriers of emotions. This poetry too works to liberate and break free from the monotony of the usual chores of life. These expressions are passionate outbursts of men wired in front of desktops and their necks stuck in mobiles, and are an assessment tool to examine the current anguish, anxiety, and ambivalence. Despite the prevailing gloominess experienced by humans across the world, digital poetry has offered a consolation in the face of human isolation.

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