



# Pandemic and Resilience— An Analysis of *Love in the time of Cholera and the Plague*

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**Abstract**— *The article proposes to provide an insight into Pandemic Literature revealing the impact of pandemic on society as well as the remarkable human resilience. Human history has witnessed a number of pandemics like cholera, plague, and the current covid-19. The word 'pandemic' is derived from the Greek words 'pan' and 'demos'. Pan means all and demos means people or crowd. Pandemic is an infectious disease widespread over a large part of the world. Resilience is the human ability to recover quickly from adverse circumstances. Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a classic piece of pandemic literature. The author says that lovesickness is a literal illness. The story takes place in the backdrop of a cholera outbreak. The marked effect of cholera on people's life and the remarkable human resilience are highlighted in the article. The protagonist's outburst in the end of the novel shows the surge of resilience. The analysis of The Plague by Albert Camus, the noted French writer throws light on helpless human beings unable to change their destinies. The writer's absurdist point of view is revealed. The novel begins with the onslaught of plague in the Algerian city of Oran. Besides the sufferings of people, the change of human attitudes and the trait of resilience are also depicted by the author.*

**Keywords**— *Absurdist, Cholera, Forever Destinies, Lovesickness, Literal Illness Surge, Plague, Pandemic, Resilience.*

Pandemic literature highlights human predicament during periods of pandemic and provides insight into political developments, impact in the socio economic fields human altitude and human relationships in the wake of pandemics. It also brings out remarkable instances of human resilience despite prolonged sufferings. Pandemic is an infectious disease widespread over a large part of the world. Throughout human history there have been a number of pandemics like cholera, plague and the current COVID-19. Pandemics have provided grist to the mill for many creative writers. The first pandemic in the world history is the Justinian plague [ 541-544]. It was followed by the Black Death [ 1347-1352 ] and the Bubonic plague in 1894. Seven cholera pandemics can be identified and the first one is believed to be originated

from India in 1817. Certain pandemics had recurring bouts in the various parts of the world.

However, human determination helped us survive the pandemics. Though subjected to untold miseries during the repeated occurrence of the pandemics the human beings have displayed remarkable resilience. People in various parts of the world faced the adverse circumstances with a laudable determination and outlived the calamities. Resilience is the human ability to recover quickly from the adverse circumstances. It is significant to note that many people developed certain desirable traits and practiced healthy habits during the pandemic. More quality time was spent with families. Hobbies like gardening and reading books were zealously pursued. Lovers of literature turned to books for the healing touch.

There has been a prolific production of pandemic literature down the ages. 'The Decameron' by Boccaccio, 'The Plague' by Albert Camus, Emily St John Mandel's, 'Station Eleven', John M Barry's 'The Great Influenza-The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History' Mary Shelly's 'Last Man', Thomas Mullen's 'Last Town on Earth' and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* bear ample testimony to the resounding success of pandemic-related themes in world literature. Gabriel Garcia Marquez was the Colombian writer who was awarded Nobel prize in literature in 1982 for his novels and short stories with a remarkable blending of realism and fantasy. Born in 1927, in the small town of Aracataca, he spent his childhood with his maternal grandparents in Northern Colombia, between the mountains and the Caribbean Sea. The ghost stories told by his grandmother were a source of inspiration for him to create his fictional world of magical realism. He started his career as a short story writer and a journalist.

His literary output consists of *One Hundred Days of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *Chronicles of a Death Foretold*, *Love and other Demons* and *No one writes to the Colonel*. *Love in the time of Cholera* was first published in 1985 in Spanish and the English translation by Alfred A. Knopf came out in 1988. It is a classic example of literature, which explores love as an emotional and mental plague in the backdrop of the Cholera pandemic. There is a subtle hint that love is a literal illness and a plague that could be compared to cholera. The novel is set in the period from 1875-1924 and the locale is Northern Colombia. The world war and cholera threatened people and the impact of these threats upset the normal life.

Narrated in the background of a cholera outbreak the novel turns the spotlight on the devastating effect of the pandemic on the lives of people. At the same time the remarkable human trait of resilience is highlighted. The protagonist Florentino Ariza's outburst at the end of the novel 'FOREVER' shows a surge of resilience. *Love in the time of Cholera* is a unique love story. It also deals with other themes like old age, lovesickness, death and resilience. Magical Realism has been effectively used in this novel. The story takes place in the midst of Pandemic as well as civil war violence. Comprising six chapters, the setting of the first and last chapter are in the twentieth century. The main characters are Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza who fall in love, in their early youth. A secret affair develops to which Fermina's aunt Escolastica provides help to exchange love letters. The threat to the course of their love comes first from Fermina's father Lorenzo Daza who forces his daughter to stop meeting Florentino forthwith. There are many vicissitudes in the life

of the protagonists and Fermina Daza gets married to Dr. Juvenal Urbino. Urbino is committed to eradicate cholera and safeguard human lives. This marriage does not douse the flames of love in Florentino's heart. He is determined to wait and it is a classic case of human determination. Urbino's love was on the material plane and Florentino's love was on the spiritual plane.

The beginning of the novel witnessed the death of Dr. Juvenal Urbino after his attempt to retrieve his pet parrot by climbing a mango tree. After the funeral the evergreen hero and lover Florentino asserts his deep love of Fermina, the widow, in spite of the passage of time and ravages of time. Florentino has to continue his determined wait for Fermina to realize the quality of his love. Finally, Fermina gives in to the matured love of Florentino and the consummation takes place after an unbelievably long period that crosses five decades.

The pet parrot is a symbol of temptation, danger and death and the initial chapter explores these themes. The next four chapters throw light on the intense love affair of Fermina and Florentino and its bitter-sweet memories. In the last chapter Florentino Ariza attains heights of glory. Despite their advanced age the lovers consummate their union successfully. The determination and resilience of Florentino finally carries the day. There is a universal pandemic in the backdrop and the 'quarantine' period for the lovers is fifty-one years nine months and four days. Eventually Florentino Ariza emerges as the great symbol of resilience. There is a breakout of cholera and the impact of war as the backdrop of the extraordinary love pursuit. The endurance of the protagonist is astonishing. There is the projection of great human suffering in the novel. When the protagonist is on board his vessel, he gets the distress signal from another vessel and he is committed to help those in distress.

Dr. Urbino and Fermina land up in their wedlock also as a result of the spread of the infection. Dr. Urbino shows determination and resilience in fighting the pandemic. Urbino is a noteworthy character but he pales into insignificance when compared to Florentino Ariza who is eternally bound to his love Fermina, despite the relentless passage of time. It is Florentino Ariza who turns out to be the everlasting symbol of love, determination and resilience. In the second chapter he avers 'There is no greater glory than to die for love'. His patience and endurance are really remarkable. From his low stature in society he rose to the position of the President of the River Bank Company of the Caribbean, in his strong resolve to be worthy of Fermina. After the death and funeral of Fermina's husband Urbino, Florentino declares his undying love to Fermina. 'Fermina' he said 'I have waited for this opportunity for more than half a century, to repeat

to you once again my vow of eternal fidelity and everlasting love’.

The end of the novel has encapsulated the wonderful resilience and determination of the protagonist. The vessel carrying the lovers also carries cholera patients and display the Cholera flag. Landing permission is denied when the lovers return to their homeland as there are strict quarantine rules in force. Florentino instructs his captain ‘Let us keep going going going back to La Dorada’ The captain asks his boss ‘Do you mean what you say’ Florentino replies ‘From the moment I was born I have never said any thing I did not mean’. Florentino is determined and intrepid. The captain finally asks ‘For how long..... this goddamn coming and going’ Florentino asserted ‘**FOREVER**’. This answer he had kept ready for fifty-three years seven months and eleven days and nights. The love story of Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza against the pandemic background will ever remain green in our memory as a tale of undying passion and resilience.

Pandemics have a great impact on human beings. Everyday life is upset. Fear and gloom over take people. However, people turn to literature, which has consoling and healing effect. Pandemic literature projects the sufferings and attitudes of people during pandemics. It also provides insights into the pandemic and offers some kind of consolation. The work that comes to mind most readily when we think of literature concerning pestilences, is *The Plague* by Albert Camus. The novel turns the spotlight on the plight of humanity in the Algerian town of Oran following the outbreak of bubonic plague. The writer comments on changes in human attitudes and focuses on the selfless commitment of Dr. Bernard Rieux who stays back in Oran condemning himself to ‘exile and imprisonment’ to treat the victims of the deadly pest. The novel *La Peste* was published in 1947 and the English version came out in 1948. The novel explores the deadly onset of plague in the 1940s after the Second World War in the Algerian town of Oran. When we trace history we come across three major instances of epidemic, plague in AD 541, 1347, and 1894 respectively. The three cases had different origins and ways of spreading. The first, Justinian plague afflicted the entire Mediterranean basin and Europe and the Byzantine Empire and persisted up to AD 549. In 1347 there was the devastating global epidemic of bubonic plague, which was also known as Black Death. The third outbreak began in China and in 1894 it reached Canton and then spread to Hong Kong and the Indian sub-continent and other parts of the world.

In the first part of the novel, the city of Oran is described. It is a humdrum city with a monotonous life. Dr. Bernard Rieux, the major character in the novel had an extraordinary experience on 16 April. He noticed a dead

rat outside his door. He felt something soft under his foot. This incident gives the first sign of an impending calamity to us, it was followed by numerous rats falling dead in different places and the streets were full of dead rats. Soon the infection spread to human beings and many people fell ill. Nobody was prepared to believe that it was the plague because they thought this disease had disappeared long ago from the world. However, reality dawned on them slowly as the city was placed into isolation and life was subjected to sudden, drastic changes. Quarantine was enforced and human contact was restricted. Camus gives us a vivid picture of the changes in society in the wake of the deadly pestilence. People became close to the family because of quarantine. At the same time the healthy people avoided the sick. In the early days of the epidemic, people of Oran are indifferent to one another suffering.

He insisted that stringent sanitation measures should be taken to counter the spreading pandemic in Oran. He believed in a personal as well as a social code of ethics. It has to be noted that his wife was away in a sanatorium, a hundred miles away when he rendered selfless service to the people of Oran during their worst crisis when Rambert, the journalist came to know of this, he also decided to team up with the brave doctor in the struggle against the plague. Before coming to know about the doctor being separated from his sick wife, Rambert was obsessed with getting back to his object of love in Paris. It was the doctor’s selfless actions, which motivated Rambert.

Jean Tarrou is another associate of Dr. Rieux who organized the sanitary groups, which enabled the people in Oran to come to grips with the deadly disease. He is described as a good-natured person who smiles a lot. He felt that the plague is everybody’s responsibility. Unfortunately, he becomes one of the last victims of the plague. However, he puts up a valiant struggle before his death. It can be seen that there were certain occasions when Dr. Rieux experienced fatigue and was almost on the verge of despondency. What is significant to note is that he revived soon and displayed remarkable resilience.

The novel was first published in 1948, three years after the Second World War ended. France was occupied by Germany from 1940 to 1944, this cut off France from the outside world just as the city of Oran was cut off from the rest of the world in the wake of the plague. Some readers have identified the allegorical reference to the German occupation in the novel. But the novel can be interpreted in many different ways. The plague may be regarded as the presence of dark evil forces. It may simply be a symbol of the human predicament. Whatever may be signified in the novel, the various characters have to gird up their loins and face the lion in its own den.

There are various choices in front of them. They can accept the situation with a kind of religious resignation. They can selfishly continue to seek their own selfish, personal interests and ignore what is going on around them. They can also exploit the situation purposely and try to make profit out of it. They can stand united, committed to the noble cause of humanity and work hard to fight the pandemic. The plague progresses with its ravages on the city of Oran. Each major character has his own specific approach to the grim scenario. Dr. Rieux and Tarrou stand out from the rest with their unique approaches. Dr. Rieux set up an auxiliary, five hundred bed hospital for the victims of plague. Working long hours, he was subjected to severe strain. On every occasion, he bounced back with resilience.

By the end of January, the plague showed signs of retreating. However, Tarrou is infected and he dies after putting up a brave fight. Joseph Grand, the government clerk also needs special mention. When plague affects the city severely, Joseph Grand acts as the general secretary of the volunteer corps. Dr. Rieux calls Joseph Grand as a true embodiment of quiet courage that motivated the sanitary groups.

The climax of the novel takes place when the gates of Oran are reopened, announcing the victory over plague. Dr. Rieux has narrated the story to teach us that though we cannot conquer death, we can fight diseases and go forward. The plague is a matchless tale depicting the scourge of plague, the predicament of the affected, empathy, determination, and resilience of certain persons dedicated to the cause of humanity. Dr. Rieux is the epitome of resistance, solidarity and resilience in the novel. He disguises himself almost till the end of the novel, referring to himself in the third person. The identity of the narrator is revealed only towards the end and this style provides objectivity. Dr. Rieux conveys the message that there is more in human nature to be admired. *The Plague* is an excellent example of pandemic literature, which vividly portrays human predicament and human resilience.

Both the works are classic pieces of pandemic literature. The authors depict the sufferings of people as well as the commendable human ability to bounce back to emotional stability in spite of stress-filled times. The analyzed pandemic fiction gives an educative experience of exploring the workings of the human mind and identifying the undertones of human capacity to rise to the occasion whenever the situation demands it. Pandemics should not dishearten us. We have to emerge stronger in the post-pandemic phase.

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