

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES



ISSN 2277 – 9809 (online)

ISSN 2348 - 9359 (Print)

An Internationally Indexed Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

www.IRJMSH.com
www.isarasolutions.com

Published by iSaRa Solutions

The Effects of Pandemic on the Characters in Raj Kamal Jha's *The Patient in Bed number 12*

Dr Sawant Singh Manto

PG Department of English
Khalsa College Amritsar

Key words :-

Pandemic trauma identity resistance rebellious

Introduction

Pandemics have a long association with humans. Right from the early references in the bible and the mythical plagues which effected various lands, humans have always faced this natural or God made disaster with courage and resilience. During the renaissance times, great plagues like the black plague wiped the entire civilizations across the known world. The plagues were seen at first as an act of God which God sends on the earth for all the evil man has committed in the world. During the enlightenment times and with the growth of scientific temper man began to see the reason behind these phenomenon. It was seen that it was a man made disaster waiting to happen. Man is himself responsible for these actions. These acts were the result of many factors human and biological which combined to create the right environment for such disasters to happen. Man began to use his mind to find ways to control these disasters. The medical field began to work overtime to find these measures by which these disasters can be controlled. The vaccines were produced which gave man the impunity to fight these diseases. Slowly by the 20th century these happenings were controlled over large parts of the world. The developed world began to declare itself free from these however it continues to create havoc in the third world countries where the vaccine projects had been made unavailable due to several factors. The colonial era also became a factor for non availability of these vaccine programs to colonized world. Man tried to play the role of God by controlling the availability of these vaccines for the 'wretched' population of the world. But after the second world war, the scenario changed. The colonial powers were forced to give up their claims on the vast areas of Asia and Africa. They were driven out willingly or forcefully out of these lands. Yet these pandemics continue to create division between the developed and the developing world. The 'white man burden' and the 'missionary' position of the first world now used this 'weapon' of vaccines to prove their superiority over the third world.

The industrialization of the world brought in pollution, poverty, garbage..... and various other problems for the world. This mutated the microbial world and new challenges began to emerge in the world. The swine flu, SARS, ebola and various other new pandemics began to challenge the world of science to face the effects of these diseases. The new millennium faced grater challenges which the world faced. The globalization effect had also played a major role in carrying the parasites from one corner of the world to the other. It is a bad effect of globalization where countries have to depend on each other to meet their needs and markets are open for all.

In 2020 the world saw pandemics return with greater force and vigor. The present crisis began on 31st December 2019 when the covid pandemic began in Wuhan city of China. The reporting of the

first case which was first seen as pneumonia but later found out to be the case of Covid19. It was an infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus which spread across China through January and reached major parts of the whole world by march 2020. As cases increased around the world, the images of empty cities and masked citizens began to emerge.

The cities around the world kept cities in lockdown from one to three months to avoid the spread. Covid had a varying mortality rate in every country with the global average estimated to be around 3.8. it had an incubation period of fourteen days during which the patient is seen to be asymptomatic. Even the economic effect of the Virus is phenomenal. According to ILO report, full or partial workforce has been affected to the count of 2.7 billion workers around the world.

Raj Kamal Jha is presently working as the chief editor of the Indian Express. He has written six novels and translated his works into six different languages. He has been awarded commonwealth prize , rabinder nath Tagore literary Award. What is unique about Jha is the fact that he started as a mechanical engineer from IIT Kharagpur. He started as a mechanical man but later on shifted to Journalism. He started working for newspapers like the stateman, India today. He has been awarded for investigative work related to the Gujrat riots of 2002. He also brought out the Bihar flood scam in which the relief was siphoned off by the officers. He has been given various prizes from national and international forums and organizations for his contribution to journalism and fiction. He has been given many epithets the latest being ‘ novelist of the newsroom’.

His style of writing is to write works which have relevance in the present times. One is most famous works is the blue Bed Spread which is on the theme of Gujrat riots. He won acclaim as well as criticism for his innovative style and writing. Another book the city and the sea is about the tragedy of violence against the women. The infamous 2012 Delhi gang rape in the national capital is one of the themes of the novel. Therefore it can be seen that he takes up contemporary issues and uses fictional mode to bring out his creativity. This also makes him one of the most controversial figures of the present set of fictional writers of the India.

The novel the patient is about a journey of a family especially a daughter who is set to reach out to her father both physically and emotionally so that she can bond with him for the last time before his death. The setting of the tale is the times of 2020s when the world witnessed the old demon of pandemic create havoc in the lives of people of the largest population of the world. India faced this human crisis with lot of emotions and logic. It faced a humanitarian crisis of a colossal type when millions of its citizen had to travel by all modes of transport mostly by foot reach their ‘homes’. The lockdown brought the cities and towns to a standstill. With the loss of livelihoods, the migrant population which was in millions in the major metros and cities of the country had to take the long walk home to their hometowns. This created a crisis which the country had never witnessed before. The covid itself came in waves sweeping populations in its wake killing many and effecting the most . Jha has taken up this and many more issues in this latest work.

Jha has brought a unique style of writing this novel. He has used the technique of anadiplosis which means “ ...the last part of the sentence is used to start the next chapter”. There is a link from one story to the other. It is almost like a breath holding on to its end the beginning

of one to the next episode. It creates a strong rhythmic or dramatic transition. It is more of a linkage or bridge. It creates a “doubling back” effect.

This frame by frame set of stories which range from a grieving mother who finds solace in the newspaper photograph, a ghost who comes to life in an abandoned fridge, children fill the empty jars with the night's darkness, a young couple try to find ways to get permission for their love and many others. All these very contemporary issues have been presented in a story mode which is typical of Jha's style of writing. He has also used the style of intertextuality in the novel where there is a direct reference to novel by James Berrie *Peter Pan*

One of the most striking part of his writing is the images built into a story mode by the writer. He has shown many stories through his writings. He has brought out the issue of mob lynching where a young man goes into the forests of Jharkhand on an adventure. But it turns out to be issue which leads to his brutal murder at the hands of the mob. Another important example of various scenes which have still not faded out of public eye. The owner of a school who could not run his school without funds and shut it out (25). There are instances of people who used to work at comfortable positions before the pandemic. But now they had to work on menial jobs just to make their ends meet. The pandemic effect has been beautifully described at various parts in the novel. The hybrid mode of teaching became normal after the pandemic effect and it continues to cause a lot of commotion every time there is a ‘emergency situation on the country. The visual images present in the novel have been exemplary effort by the writer. The protagonist sees a father, mother and daughter on a cycle carrying their essential loads on a bicycle this became a scene which was time and again happening before our eyes during the times of the pandemic. In these testing times, the warriors on the forefront the medics had to face the most torrid times most of them stayed rooted to their jobs but there were many who “who stopped coming to work given the pandemic, they were worried that they will get infected”(95). Jha captures all the moments of the times in his work. “thermal scanners... yellow dots in their eyes, they are the carriers, bundle them in another truck to quarantine...(110).

There are many aspects of the novel which need to be looked into in this analysis. The trauma is one of the first aspect of study. The very first line of the novel shows the trauma of the event when the protagonist warns his daughter who is coming from far off place to see her father for the last time “I am infected, please keep your daughter away from me.” (3). The story of these patients in these specially created wards and facilities within the hospitals is heart rendering.

‘they were kept away from the touch or meeting through the glass they sparkle’(3). how the disease was slowly taking away the patients away from their loved ones is described as “the disease has bibbed me down...to dry bone, thin blood . paper skin.(8).

There are various expressions used by the novelist which keeps the reader engaged in how the disease effects the physical and mental state of mind of the patients. He uses the expression like “the eyes of those who cannot sleep” (155) to describe the condition of the patients . he also makes use of such expression “places where ghosts lie in wait”(155) to describe the hospitals which shows that death loomed large everywhere.

The physical effect is also creating an identity crisis within the patients. When the protagonist, who is kept nameless through out the text, faces this existential crisis “ neither man nor woman nor child, I am nothing as well” (33) he seems like Willy Loman from the *Death Of A Sales Man* who has similar kind of thoughts. It can also be seen in the characters of Estragon and Vladimir in the play “ **Waiting for Godot**”

Irony and parody have been the tools which Jha usually makes use of when he is to present his tongue in the cheek style of writing. The protagonist makes this dig at technology in the present age when he says

“ my friends are gone, the only ones who know me well, who have time for me are perhaps Google and WhatsApp, a little bit of Amazon, because they know what I do, where I am...”(41)

The tragedy of loosing the loved ones is also presented through various characters and events. The reference to a man who has kept his phone number with his dead mother even three months after her death. “ what if she is still there”(44) he know that she will not come back because they have kept her “ wrapped in a bio seal plastic” (44).

How Jha presents those stark details of number games which the governments used to show that they were winning the case against the pandemic is presented as “ ...on the wall...the muted T.V. screen flashes the number for the dead, the number of active cases. And now...number of vaccinated.(46)

Jha also presented the trauma of loss of human life and relationships in this novel. The most important episode is of the father and daughter which are the main protagonist of the novel. The father daughter duo had suffered earlier loss of their mother through another great divider cancer in the twentieth century. They faced another challenge, this time of inter faith marriage when the daughter married a non hindu- “ the rage, the shouting”(77). The father “ turned into a stone”(77) when he came to know of the marriage.

The loss is not only in terms of deaths but the other losses too also create a catastrophe in the lives of people. The loss of jobs and businesses created an economic situation which was difficult for people to comprehend and respond to. The following lines describe the tragedy

“ the tailor closed his store, all the women who worked as domestic help are out of work; the beauty salons is closed down...the young men who work as guard in the mall are all out of jobs... they are in the taxi heading home through the locked -down city”(147)

The identity is another important issue in the novel. The identity of the protagonist is never revealed through out the novel. He is presented as “ my address is Bed number 12. My patient ID 15/08/22”(5)

The Daughter suffers her identity crisis when she marries a non Hindu. Her name is now Nisha Kumar Rehman(7) which is also a crisis for her and her family. The patient faces a crisis of loss of memory during these torrid times. He mixes the dates, names and people time and again during the events. He faces hallucinations like walking out of the window of the hospital “ I slip through the cracks in frame...”(14).

It can be seen that trauma and loss create havoc with the mind and the body of the various characters in the novel. But the novel is not only about these issues which are not easy to counter.

But Jha has also brought out elements of resilience and resistance in the novel. The narrator may be an old patient who is on the point of death and has limited scope of improving his health. The video sent by the daughter featuring her daughter and herself seems to add new life to the dying protagonist. He does not know that the ending of the video is as tragic as the story going around him. Yet it adds a charm to his dying spirit. It seems to him to be “my flesh and blood”(5) though it gives him a lease of new life yet he cannot keep the reality away from him for long. The memory of his children in that few minutes of reel add new life to him but he claims that “blood that’s now infected”.

Jha has been an advocate of humanism in his works and writings. He presents a rebellious daughter of the protagonist. She is the one symbol of resistance and rebelliousness in the novel, she stands against the forces of patriarchy and religious dogmatism in the form of her father. The father does not approve of her marriage to a different religious person. But she claims that she will run away from the house. She still reminds her father “I remain your daughter but now I am Nisha Kumar Rehman too”(78). Even when they face the hooligans at the beach, she is the one who stands against the vigilantes and fights them.

Jha also presents the story of interfaith love story during the times of Covid. They live at their homes in a joint family. Yet they find time to call each other at least three times a day. The image created by the writer shows the longing of the lovers in these difficult times. “I wish we were clothes ... we could even touch each other”(133). They try to find their peace through these short talks. Yet there is hope within them. They feel that government has created a law by which those who want to go for inter faith marriage will get police protection. So through such characters the writer wants to show how the resistance to various hindrances in the society can be dealt with.

The novel is a work of efforts of the writer to show case present times in India. The Bharat and India effect has created a kind of divide in the society along with this the religious divide and other divides have already made life difficult for ordinary Indians. The covid created more problems in the form of economic division, needs for basic living and various other issues. The governments of the times did not do enough for the people to fight this times of crisis. They were left to fend for themselves which was not the right kind of thinking for the times. Similarly the leaders were busy with keeping their bodies and mind safe from others. Jha has presented a very defining picture through his writing. It may not be the very best work of the writer. Yet he has created a true picture of contemporary times .

Works cited

- Jha, Raj Kamal. *The Patient in Bed number 12*. Penguin Hamish Hamilton, London. 2023
Jha, Raj Kamal. *The Blue Bedspread*. Picador, London. 2009.
Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan*. Ancient Chapters, London, 2026.
Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. Fingerprint Publishing, New York. 2017.



EARN YOUR

MBA

WWW.IIMPS.IN



Accreditation & Ranking



UGC / NCTE Approved.

INFO@IIMPS.IN

☎ 011-41005174

RESEARCH
GATEWAY

STOP PLAGIARISM



Arogyam Ayurveda
Holistic Healing through herbs



AROGYAM
ONLINE

PARIVARTAN PSYCHOLOGY CENTER

परिवर्तन

COLOR PSYCHOLOGY : HOW COLOR AFFECT YOUR CHILD



BLUE

Calms your Child's
Mind & Body

YELLOW

Promotes Concentration,
Stimulates the Memory

PINK

Evokes Empathy,
makes your Child Calm

RED

Excites and energizes
your Child's body

GREEN

Improves Reading speed
and Comprehension

www.parivartan4u.com



परिवर्तन

Confuse about your children's future?

भारतीय भाषा, शिक्षा, साहित्य एवं शोध

ISSN 2321 – 9726

WWW.BHARTIYASHODH.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
MANAGEMENT SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

ISSN – 2250 – 1959 (O) 2348 – 9367 (P)

WWW.IRJMSST.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
COMMERCE, ARTS AND SCIENCE**

ISSN 2319 – 9202

WWW.CASIRJ.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
MANAGEMENT SOCIOLOGY & HUMANITIES**

ISSN 2277 – 9809 (O) 2348 - 9359 (P)

WWW.IRJMSH.COM



**INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF SCIENCE
ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY**

ISSN 2454-3195 (online)

WWW.RJSET.COM



**INTEGRATED RESEARCH JOURNAL OF
MANAGEMENT, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**

ISSN 2582-5445

WWW.IRJMSI.COM



**JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES, POLITICS
AND ECONOMICS RESEARCH**

WWW.JLPER.COM

JLPE