



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Pandemic Society In Post-2020 Fiction

Farhin Jahan

Assistant Professor (Senior Scale)

Department of English

Ganga Devi Mahila Mahavidyala, Patna

Patliputra University, Patna

Abstract

In addition to being a historical event, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reshaped society worldwide since 2020, is also a potent literary metaphor. In order to reflect on human resilience, social fragmentation, and the reinvention of community in disaster, this study examines how post-2020 fiction depicts the sociological, psychological, and existential effects of pandemics. This article explores how pandemic narratives serve as metaphors for larger societal anxieties and desires by analysing important works in the genre. It examines themes including isolation, technology, governance, and survival. The study also examines how, in the setting of a world permanently changed by a worldwide health catastrophe, these novels question conventional ideas of time, space, and reality.

Keywords: Mental health, Pandemic, Resilience, Society, Tradition, etc.

Introduction

Unquestionably, the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted society's structure, operations, self-perception, and public health. Many authors used the pandemic as a plot device and a metaphor for the complicated problems facing modern civilisation as the world entered the post-pandemic age, reflecting these major developments in literature.

The genre of pandemic fiction has grown significantly since 2020, with writers tackling topics like political control, solitude, system fragility, and the search for purpose in a world that has been upended. These literary works make understanding the social and psychological ramifications of pandemics on people and communities easier. In addition to serving narrative functions, they also capture the anxieties, aspirations, and existential concerns that have surfaced in the wake of world tragedies.

With an emphasis on how the pandemic is portrayed in these stories, the societal structures they represent, and the psychological and emotional landscapes of characters who experience such extraordinary times, this paper examines the issue of "Pandemic Society" in post-2020 literature. This study investigates how authors envision a post-pandemic society and the societal repercussions that come with such worldwide catastrophes by looking at a few pieces of post-2020 fiction.

Literature Review

1. Pandemic Literature: A Brief History

The human experience of illness outbreaks is explored in pandemic literature, which has existed in a variety of forms throughout history to reflect civilisations' changing perceptions of social catastrophe and contagion. The genre is distinguished by its emphasis on terror, survival, loneliness, and the moral conundrums raised by widespread disease. These works, which range from early apocalyptic literature to more recent analyses of worldwide pandemics, provide a prism to view how illness alters physical bodies and the social, moral, and psychological realms.

The earliest examples of pandemic literature date back to the ancient and mediaeval periods, when plagues were frequently interpreted as social retaliation or divine punishment. One of the first examples is Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1972), which tells of a plague that decimated Athens' population and caused morality and social norms to disintegrate. Rather than blaming illness entirely on the gods, Thucydides' narrative is notable for being among the first to provide a logical, secular explanation.

The Black Death, often known as the bubonic plague, sparked a number of stories during the Middle Ages. The most well-known example is probably Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1940), which tells the story of a group of young people fleeing the plague in Florence and uses storytelling to kill time. The sense of impending doom and the breakdown of social order in the face of disease are evident, despite the fact that a large portion of the story concentrates on human foolishness and societal foolishness in the face of death.

Thanks in great part to developments in epidemiology and microbiology, the 19th century witnessed a growing understanding of disease transmission as the globe entered the modern era. Narratives about the plague continued, but there was a discernible shift towards examining illness's social and psychological effects.

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1900), which blends historical and fictional elements to reflect on the Great Plague of London (1665), is among the most important works of this era. Even though it was published in the early 1700s, Defoe's depiction of societal disintegration, quarantine regulations, and public panic foreshadows later pandemic-related works.

The cholera and yellow fever outbreaks in the late 19th century sparked additional literary analyses of human resiliency and suffering. For instance, the 1990 novella *The Black Swan* by Thomas Mann uses existential themes of fate, inevitability, and the randomness of suffering to examine the repercussions of a pandemic on a small society.

New viewpoints on pandemic literature emerged in the 20th century, especially after the 1918 Spanish flu, one of the deadliest pandemics in recorded history. The seclusion brought on by quarantine, government reactions to pandemics, and human death all became increasingly overt topics in literature during this time.

One of the most influential pandemic novels of the 20th century is *The Plague* (1948) by Albert Camus. Camus' allegorical tale of a fatal plague, set in the made-up Algerian town of Oran, illustrates the moral and philosophical isolation of the human condition and the physical isolation caused by the illness. In the canon of pandemic literature, his examination of how people react to suffering—whether in defiance, denial, or solidarity—has taken centre stage.

Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain* (1970), which explores the ramifications of a biological alien life form that threatens humanity and combines science fiction and epidemic themes, is another important book. Growing concerns about new technology and biological warfare during the Cold War era are reflected in this work.

Global pandemics have garnered more attention in the twenty-first century, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SARS outbreak, and the HIV/AIDS crisis. The narrative landscape changed in the early 2000s, with many authors examining pandemics as metaphors for environmental breakdown, political indifference, or cultural dysfunction in addition to being physical occurrences.

Although not directly about a pandemic, Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006), which portrays a post-apocalyptic world in which a catastrophic event has wiped off most of humanity, is one of the most important works of the early twenty-first century. Many elements of pandemic literature, like survivalism, loss, and the disintegration of societal order, are reflected in the survivors' physical and psychological suffering.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 solidified pandemic literature as an essential genre. Works like Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018), which explores viral infection and its societal repercussions, received considerable attention in the wake of the global crisis. The book envisions a worldwide pandemic brought on by the enigmatic illness known as 'Shen Fever,' which causes its victims to become zombified and apathetic. Ma's gloomy satire addresses topics of employment, loneliness, and detachment while criticising the global capitalist system.

Author Lawrence Wright chronicles the early phases of the COVID-19 epidemic in *The Plague Year* (2021), examining the disease's worldwide effects by fusing firsthand recollections with political and scientific analysis. Similarly, journalist Debora Mackenzie's book *Covid-19: The Pandemic that Never Should Have Happened and How to Stop the Next One* (2020) examines the social, political, and economic aspects of a worldwide disaster and how pandemic planning was insufficient.

2. Pandemic in the 21st Century: COVID-19 and Literary Responses

In addition to the changing global economy and health, the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in late 2019 and lasted well into the twenty-first century, has significantly influenced literature. The crisis has prompted a variety of responses from writers, poets, and playwrights, who have offered analyses, critiques, and investigations of how such a worldwide occurrence alters societal interactions, personal identities, and the human experience. From novels and short stories to poetry and non-fiction articles, the epidemic has inspired a vast array of literary works that explore themes like dread, loneliness, resiliency, and the disintegration of social norms.

In literary circles, the first reaction to the epidemic frequently involved documenting the crisis's psychological and emotional toll. For example, Kim Stanley Robinson depicts a future influenced by pandemics and climate change in his book *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), offering a sombre yet optimistic view of human survival and adaptation. Similarly, despite being created before the pandemic, Ling Ma's *Severance* examines the effects of a worldwide infection on society, which became more pertinent in light of COVID-19.

Poetry has also been a potent tool for conveying feelings of loss and longing and individual and societal mourning. Authors such as Anne Boyer consider the connections between disease, death, and the health crisis

in her 2019 poetry collection *The Undying* (2019). Boyer's work resonated strongly during the pandemic and anticipated public discussions about societal neglect and health disparity.

The substantial shifts in how society functions, particularly with regard to labour, mobility, and public health, are also reflected in literary reactions to the epidemic. Numerous writers examine the ways in which social separation, quarantine regulations, and the shift to digital communication have changed interpersonal relationships. Discussions about the nature of community, the vulnerability of international systems, and the political and human difficulties of coping with such a unique occurrence have all been sparked by the pandemic.

All things considered, the literary reactions to COVID-19 show how important art is for absorbing societal trauma and envisioning potential futures. In addition to highlighting the pandemic's horrors, these pieces also demonstrate how resilient and adaptive people can be when faced with extreme adversity.

Methodology

The study examines a few chosen novels using a qualitative, comparative method, emphasising textual analysis and thematic interpretation. Significant literary works are selected according to their critical reception and applicability to narratives about the epidemic emerging after 2020. Every work is examined in terms of how it depicts individual and societal reactions to a worldwide health emergency.

Key Themes in Post-2020 Pandemic Fiction

1. Isolation and Alienation

Since loneliness and alienation become essential aspects of the human experience during the global COVID-19 epidemic, post-2020 pandemic literature has been a rich source for examining these topics. Authors have employed these themes to depict the significant disruptions to social and personal life brought about by quarantine regulations, lockdowns, and the general feeling of alienation brought on by the pandemic. These literary investigations frequently reflect a more general, existential sense of alienation from other people and the outside world.

A major topic in many post-2020 pandemic fiction is physical and emotional isolation. Characters are frequently shown as isolated from friends, family, and society and compelled to face their inner selves in ways that reveal their weaknesses. Ling Ma's novel *Severance*, which imagines a pandemic that causes social breakdown, powerfully captures this idea. The main character, Candace, must live alone while navigating a declining world. Ma examines the psychological effects of social isolation, using Candace's personal search for purpose in a society in disarray to illustrate the extreme loneliness resulting from physical seclusion. Ma writes, "It felt like I was alone with the ghost of the world, with no one to talk to" (Ma, 2018, p. 129).

The feeling of loneliness is profoundly existential as well as physical. Writers frequently highlight how loneliness intensifies alienation, resulting in a deep detachment from oneself, other people, and the wider world. Isolation is a recurring subject in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*, especially as the protagonists struggle with the pandemic's effects on society and the environment. One character's reflection provides an example of the emotional alienation that frequently follows the external isolation brought on by the pandemic: "The isolation was all-consuming, making it feel like I was no longer part of the world at all" (Robinson, 2020, p. 212).

Characters in post-pandemic fiction frequently have heightened feelings of alienation, becoming estranged from both their own sense of self and other people. Works that look at the disintegration of social structures and norms are especially clear examples of this issue. Kazuo Ishiguro discusses the alienation of artificial beings as they try to fit in with human civilisation in *Klara and the Sun* (2021). The novel's examination of societal changes that reflect the alienation felt by many during the COVID-19 crisis creates a similar sensation of isolation, even if it is not specifically about the pandemic.

Elena Ferrante explores how the physical separations caused by the pandemic lead to a more profound emotional alienation in *The Lying Life of Adults* (2020), where the protagonist struggles with her own evolving sense of self in a society where the lines separating the private and public spheres are becoming increasingly hazy. Because of the pandemic's disturbances, Ferrante's protagonists frequently experience a sense of estrangement from both their surroundings and their former selves. The protagonist illustrates the psychological effects of living in a world that no longer feels familiar when she muses, "I felt as though the person I had been was slipping further away from me" (Ferrante, 2020, p. 58).

Technology's ability to simultaneously close and widen the divide between people is a crucial component of post-pandemic alienation in fiction. Many novels show a technology alienation where characters are becoming increasingly cut off from the real world due to the pandemic forcing people to rely on digital platforms for communication. In her book *The Future of Another Timeline* (2019), Annalee Newitz discusses how technology can be both a boon and a bane, creating a sense of alienation and disengagement that has become widespread since the pandemic.

2. Technology and Surveillance

Technology and monitoring have become major topics in post-epidemic literature following the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. These pieces investigate the relationship between technology, privacy, and social control, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of new technologies in a world that a worldwide crisis has drastically altered. Concerns regarding privacy, autonomy, and striking a balance between security and freedom have increased due to the pandemic's acceleration in the deployment of digital technologies, contact tracing, and surveillance techniques. These fears are reflected in post-2020 literary responses, which frequently paint a picture of a dystopian future or futuristic scenario in which technology simultaneously links and separates people and surveillance is pervasive.

The function of surveillance in upholding public health and social order is one of the key topics of post-pandemic literature. Hence, Kim Stanley Robinson contends that monitoring is used to control social behaviour globally and for public health. The novel's portrayal of efforts to mitigate climate change entails a great deal of monitoring of individuals and groups, which raises moral concerns regarding surveillance for more general social and environmental objectives. The Ministry's use of technologies that track citizens to enforce climate policy is one example of how Robinson examines the tension between privacy and collective security: "We were all being monitored, but it felt like a necessary intrusion to keep the world from falling apart" (Robinson, 2020, p. 314).

In other fictional works, characters are continuously monitored under the pretence of health and safety, echoing the idea that surveillance is a necessary evil. The lines between private and public life are blurred by

the widespread use of social media and online surveillance, which Elena Ferrante finds in *The Lying Life of Adults*. Characters have a sense of alienation and loss of control due to being watched by both institutions and one another. Ferrante highlights the psychological effects of ongoing surveillance when he writes, "I felt as though my life had become an open book for anyone to read" (Ferrante, 2020, p. 120).

Although surveillance plays a significant role in many post-pandemic works, technology is also presented as a tool that unites and divides people. The extensive use of digital platforms for business, socialising, and pleasure throughout the epidemic demonstrated how important technology is to preserving human relationships. Nonetheless, a lot of novels written after the 2020 pandemic explore how this dependence on technology might result in emotional detachment and a lack of genuine human connection. The protagonist in *Klara and the Sun*, an artificial friend named Klara, muses on the contradiction of technology's place in human existence. Despite being continuously connected by technology, she observes that people are becoming more and more isolated from one another: "I noticed how people sat next to each other, each one absorbed in their screen, alone together" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 172). This statement perfectly captures how technology frequently increases emotional distance, even if it provides new opportunities for interaction.

In a similar vein, Ling Ma portrays a world where a worldwide pandemic has evolved into a form of technocratic dystopia. Candace, the book's main character, uses the digital tools at her disposal to feel both connected and alone. Thanks to technology, she can stay educated and connected, but it also keeps her in a vicious circle of social disengagement and alienation. In her exploration of the negative effects of excessive reliance on technology, Ma makes a claim that "I was scrolling through my feed, but I felt further away from the world than ever before" (Ma, 2018, p. 164), implying that technology makes people feel even more disconnected.

The idea of a digital panopticon, in which technology turns into an all-seeing force that continuously observes people's movements, behaviours, and interactions, also overlaps with the concept of surveillance in post-pandemic literature. Annalee Newitz suggests that technology is crucial in determining the political and social climate. The story explores time-travelling technology and its potential to produce a world where people's behaviour is constantly monitored and managed. Given that location-based monitoring and digital tracking apps were widely used during the epidemic, digital surveillance as a form of governance is especially relevant now. As Newitz explains, "In this world, every step, every moment, was potentially being logged, recorded, and judged" (Newitz, 2019, p. 231); he examines how such technology might eventually be used to regulate social habits in addition to public health.

3. Governmental Power and Control

Governmental power and control become major topics in post-2020 pandemic fiction, expressing concerns about the state's crisis management role and the effects of centralised authority during domestic and international events. Debates concerning how to strike a balance between individual liberties and the requirement for social stability were sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated the extent to which governments could control movements, affect public life, and implement broad programs for the benefit of all. Many works depict dystopian or near-dystopian settings where government control is either perceived

as vital for survival or as a kind of overreach and tyranny. Post-pandemic literature frequently examines these issues.

The implementation of public health measures like quarantine, lockdowns, and mass surveillance is one of the main ways that government authority appears in post-pandemic fiction. Kim Stanley Robinson presents a nuanced perspective on governmental power in the light of pandemics and climate change in *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). The novel envisions a future in which the Ministry, a global governing body, implements drastic measures to fight climate change, such as laws that limit individual liberties for the benefit of the environment. Although these measures are presented as essential to the planet's existence, they also highlight the dangers of authoritarian rule during emergencies. According to Robinson, "We were forced to take these actions. "We had to control the people because the earth was dying, or else everything would fall apart" (Robinson, 2020, p. 289). This quotation highlights the novel's examination of the complicated moral and ethical issues surrounding government action in the wake of a major world disaster.

Similar to this, Ling Ma's *Severance* depicts government power through the prism of a worldwide epidemic in which a mystery illness known as "the fever" obliterates entire populations. The administration is shown in the book fighting to stop the virus's spread while simultaneously coping with the ensuing social and economic collapse. The state's response to the pandemic is portrayed as simultaneously repressive and protective, with authorities controlling residents in ways that conflate authoritarianism and public health. According to Ma, "The government was everywhere, yet invisible—through their data, their measures, their orders, their silence" (Ma, 2018, p. 215). This depiction captures the uncertainty of post-crisis state power, which is both necessary and disturbing.

The issue of government surveillance is frequently entwined with worries about individual liberty and privacy in post-pandemic literature. The amount to which governments can encroach on people's private lives is called into question by the use of technology to track citizens' travels, track health data, and enforce quarantine measures. Although artificial intelligence is the main topic of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, the book also discusses the wider ramifications of technology surveillance and the degradation of privacy in a regulated society. Despite not specifically addressing the epidemic, Ishiguro's book envisions a society in which people's lives are controlled by unseen forces, with technology determining the social standing and fates of its protagonists. Ishiguro considers state authority to be subtle yet ubiquitous: "Everyone is being observed. However, nobody knows who is observing (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 182). This is part of a larger discussion about monitoring in a post-pandemic society when state control is more pervasive but less obvious.

Elena Ferrante also examines how governmental authorities use digital surveillance and social media in *The Lying Life of Adults*. Through the protagonist's journey through a city that is becoming more and more dominated by online platforms, it becomes clear how corporate and governmental interests work together to influence public opinion. Digital surveillance systems, which follow and monitor behaviour to maintain public safety, are another way that the state exerts control over people in addition to direct intervention. Ferrante's character muses, "I couldn't tell if I was being watched by my family or by the entire world through the screen," (Ferrante, 2020, p. 167). This implies that the political and personal spheres are becoming more and more entwined, with the authority of the state spreading into the sphere of private and personal identity.

A lot of post-pandemic narratives also look at how governments can use crises to bolster their authority and establish authoritarian control. Annalee Newitz's *The Future of Another Timeline* centres on the use of time-travelling technology by influential organisations to change history for political ends. The story addresses broader worries about how governments may utilise extraordinary technologies and emergencies to control populations, even though it is not specifically about the COVID-19 epidemic. Control over history becomes a metaphor for the possible misuse of power in times of crisis in a society where the chronology itself is manipulable. Newitz emphasises the peril of unbridled political power when he argues, "In times of panic, rulers do not seek to save; they seek to control" (Newitz, 2019, p. 245).

Similar explorations of this authoritarian topic may be found in Naomi Alderman's book *The Power* (2016), written before the epidemic but gained greater attention after 2020. When women in Alderman's hypothetical universe acquire the ability to shock people with electricity, the power dynamics between the sexes change, and the state gains more authority over the new social structure. The story addresses the issue of how governmental forces utilise crises as an excuse to maintain population control despite its focus on gender dynamics. Authoritarian power flourishes during vulnerable times, as the novel suggests when it says, "In moments of great upheaval, the state will always find ways to regulate" (Alderman, 2016, p. 354).

4. Social Fragmentation and Community Building

Social disintegration and community development are major topics in post-2020 pandemic fiction, which has become a prominent genre. These pieces frequently highlight attempts to restore and re-establish connections while also examining how cultures and individuals react to loneliness, loss, and the disintegration of social norms.

The pandemic symbolised the breakdown of social cohesiveness. *The Last Thing He Told Me* by Laura Dave and *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson both portray a future in which the virus worsens inequality, dividing communities based on race, class, and resource availability. People struggle with feelings of loneliness, loss, and alienation from their pre-pandemic social networks in the emotional and mental spheres as well. As characters search for purpose in a broken world, the social isolation caused by lockdowns and physical separation emerges as a recurrent motif.

Many post-pandemic tales highlight the significance of new forms of solidarity and collective action in reaction to the breakdown of traditional communities. Characters in books like Lawrence Wright's *The Plague Year* and Ling Ma's *Severance* look for methods to mend relationships, whether through more significant social changes or more modest mutual aid networks. These pieces explore the ways in which hardship can result in the development of fresh, welcoming societies that place a higher value on compassion, resource sharing, and group survival. According to these narratives, community-building is an active, continuous process of reinventing what it means to be linked in a post-pandemic society rather than only a reaction to a catastrophe.

5. Post-Pandemic Futures: Utopias and Dystopias

The speculative investigation of future worlds, which frequently veers between utopian and apocalyptic visions, has significantly influenced post-2020 pandemic fiction. In the wake of a global catastrophe, these pieces explore how humanity can recover or fall apart; some present narratives of hope, while others highlight the possibility of a more bleak and divided future.

Some post-pandemic works provide ideas of optimism and rejuvenation in opposition to the dismal narrative. The writers examine the potential for a more sustainable and egalitarian world to emerge from the ashes of a pandemic. The pandemic is a driving force behind economic and environmental changes aimed at building a more equitable and sustainable global society in books like Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*. Similarly, Peng Shepherd's *The Book of M* envisions a time following a widespread mental pandemic when a new sense of communal memory and understanding arises, implying that people may embrace a closer bond with one another and the environment.

These utopian ideas, which emphasise social justice, group action, and environmental concern, provide hopeful prospects where societal breakdown is followed by dramatic transformation, even though difficulties frequently temper them. In the future, the epidemic will turn into a turning point that will create a more peaceful and aware society.

Conversely, a lot of post-pandemic literature depicts bleak futures with growing authoritarianism, societal disintegration, and ongoing fragmentation. Dystopian literature, such as Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, emphasises how the pandemic deepens already-existing power disparities, resulting in further oppression and social division. According to Ling Ma's *Severance*, the epidemic hastens the breakdown of societal structures, creating a dismal and disjointed future in which surviving becomes a lonely and disjointed endeavour.

These apocalyptic futures frequently reflect fears of heightened monitoring, economic disparity, and the deepening of social divisions that the epidemic exposed and exacerbated. According to these stories, the virus portends a future in which human shortcomings, such as selfishness, inequality, and a failure to solve systemic problems, will condemn humanity to a dismal existence.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Psychological Impact of Pandemics

Pandemics have a significant psychological influence on people and civilisations, particularly ones as large and protracted as COVID-19. These impacts can affect relationships, personal behaviour, and even social systems, ranging from short-term stress and trauma to long-term mental health issues. Literature frequently examines the psychological effects of pandemics, offering a glimpse into the intricacies of human emotion, adaptability, and survival.

Pandemics can have acute psychological repercussions that are characterised by feelings of powerlessness, fear, and anxiety. An atmosphere of increased stress is produced by the ambiguity surrounding infection, the dread of getting sick or dying, and the ongoing media attention. Characters in pieces like Ling Ma's *Severance* deal with the psychological effects of loneliness as well as the dread of spreading the disease. People's lives and mental stability are disrupted by the pandemic, both literally and figuratively. Long-lasting psychological

scars and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) might result from the trauma of witnessing mass disease, losing loved ones, and the disruption of routines (Cullen et al., 2020, pp. 311-312).

Isolation is one of the most important psychological effects of a pandemic. People are left to face their fears and concerns alone when social distancing techniques and lockdowns create physical and emotional distance. Depression, substance misuse, and a sense of alienation are frequently caused by loneliness, which is made worse by quarantine regulations. Characters in Richard Powers' *The Overstory* experienced personal loss and battle the alienation brought on by the epidemic and environmental breakdown, illustrating the psychological costs of solitude. These stories capture the larger reality of social disengagement, in which a loss of interpersonal contact results in a deterioration in mental health.

Significant loss—whether of loved ones, livelihoods, or a feeling of normalcy—occurs frequently during pandemics. This pervasive sadness can result in extended periods of mourning and complex grief reactions when people find it challenging to manage their feelings in an uncertain world. Characters in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* struggle with personal and societal mourning, illustrating the psychological toll of loss and the social unrest following the pandemic. Future generations' mental health may be impacted by the trauma of collective loss, particularly in areas most affected by the pandemic.

Pandemics demonstrate human adaptability and resilience despite the profound psychological effects. A common theme in literature is how people and groups manage, recover, and create new social ties. Survivors of a worldwide pandemic in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* develop new kinds of meaning and community, illustrating how people can psychologically adjust to even the most trying situations. These accounts imply that whereas pandemics reveal vulnerabilities, they also present chances for individual development, group camaraderie, and the restoration of psychological health.

2. Reconstruction of Society

A major theme in a lot of post-2020 fiction is the reconstruction of society after a worldwide epidemic, examining how communities recover from destruction and the potential emergence of new social, political, and economic structures. The pandemic acts as a backdrop for rethinking the systems that characterise daily life as well as a stimulus for social change. These stories bring up significant issues of how societies deal with issues of resilience, inequality, and group effort following a major tragedy.

The disintegration of social institutions and the process of re-establishing communities and connections are common themes in post-pandemic fiction. Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* is one work that examines how the crisis leads to both the dissolution and the reconstruction of international systems. Although the epidemic in Robinson's book exacerbates already-existing injustices and environmental damage, it also encourages the creation of new, more inclusive political and economic structures meant to combat global inequality and climate change. According to the novel, societal reconstruction must be based on radical change, where more egalitarian and sustainable alternatives replace the outdated systems of exploitation and division.

In a similar vein, Ling Ma's *Severance* explores how institutions and economic systems fall apart while the surviving create new, frequently ad hoc societies. These new societies show a form of adaptation in which people give up on conventional rules and have to survive by navigating a shattered reality. This adaptation

process emphasises the need for adaptability, collaboration, and a rethinking of what communities can look like in a drastically changed world to reconstruct civilisation after a pandemic.

Political and economic structures are frequently criticised and reimagined in post-pandemic fiction. The epidemic highlights the flaws in capitalist systems, where mass suffering results from the pursuit of profit at the expense of public health and safety. Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* imagines a future in which a lack of resources worsens social disintegration and the fight for water turns into a new kind of power. The populace in this dystopian scenario is forced to contend with new forms of governance that put survival above individualism due to the breakdown of the current systems. These pieces challenge society's ability and desire to create new economic models that prioritise shared resources, sustainability, and equity over continuing exploitation and injustice.

On the more hopeful end of the spectrum, Peng Shepherd's *The Book of M* presents a picture of a post-pandemic society in which a new kind of communal memory is formed. In this environment, people start to remember and experience other people's histories and identities in a more profound and connected way. To mend a broken society, this hypothetical reconstruction strongly emphasises empathy and connection.

The necessity of collective trauma healing is another essential component of society reconstruction in post-pandemic literature. Following widespread disease, death, and upheaval, healing becomes a crucial component of rebuilding. In books like Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, which is set against a backdrop of environmental devastation and a worldwide pandemic, characters must deal with both individual and group grief while negotiating the challenges of mending their connections with the environment and one another. Psychological and cultural healing is portrayed as a complex, nonlinear process that is ultimately essential to communities' long-term survival and well-being.

3. The Pandemic as a Metaphor

Numerous social, political, and existential concerns have been compared to the COVID-19 epidemic. According to Susan Sontag (1978), illnesses frequently take on symbolic meanings that influence societal views outside of their medical actuality. In a similar vein, COVID-19 has been used as a metaphor for human fragility, state power, and global inequality.

Žižek (2020), for example, sees the pandemic as an intellectual crisis that highlights the limitations of neoliberalism and the vulnerability of capitalism. The virus's quick spread brought to light inequalities in digital divides, healthcare access, and economic security (Mbembe, 2021). Governments invoked the crisis to defend biopolitical control and surveillance, comparing it to Agamben's (2005) concept of the "state of exception" and Foucault's (1977) idea of the "panopticon."

Furthermore, because lockdowns resulted in short-term pollution reductions and a re-evaluation of the links between humans and nature, the pandemic changed the way that people talked about climate change and environmental concerns (Latour, 2020). Additionally, it heightened discussions about mental health and social isolation, supporting Durkheim's idea of anomie in contemporary society.

From Camus' *The Plague* (1948) to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), pandemics have long been employed as metaphors for moral and social deterioration in literature and the media. This tradition is carried on by

COVID-19, which represents the unpredictable nature of existence in an increasingly interconnected globe. In the end, the epidemic serves as a metaphor for underlying fears of inequality, power, and human resiliency.

Conclusion

Deep-seated fears about the future, the function of government, the tenacity of the human spirit, and the social fabric that binds countries together are revealed in post-2020 pandemic fiction. We might learn more about the possible futures we might encounter, as well as how the overlapping forces of politics, technology, and culture are influencing our present reality by looking at how authors depict pandemic societies. These books encourage readers to consider the course humanity is on and the decisions that will shape the post-pandemic world by providing both cautions and optimism for the future.

In conclusion, the portrayal of pandemic societies in post-2020 fiction reflects the profound impact of global health crises on our collective consciousness. Authors have explored not only the immediate physical and societal disruptions caused by pandemics but also the deeper psychological, political, and cultural shifts that follow. These narratives serve as both a mirror to our current realities and a speculative space to explore the fragility and resilience of human existence. Through dystopian and post-apocalyptic settings, as well as more intimate, character-driven stories, post-2020 fiction grapples with themes of isolation, social division, and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world. This evolving genre highlights our fears, our hopes, and our ongoing struggle to adapt, making it an essential part of contemporary literature as we navigate the complexities of living in a pandemic-impacted world. As we move forward, it is clear that the pandemic will continue to shape not only the stories we tell but also the ways we understand and relate to each other in the aftermath.

Acknowledgement

This is to acknowledge that a single author has written the paper. The paper has neither been sent anywhere for publication nor even for consideration.

Conflict of Interest

The paper does not have any conflict of interest.

Funding

Any agency has not funded the paper.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. (trans.) Kevin Attell. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Alderman, Naomi. 2016. *The Power*. Great Britain: Viking.
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. 1940. *The Decameron*. (trans.) John Payne. New York: The Sun Dial Press.
- Boyer, Anne. 2019. *The Undying*. USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Camus, Albert. 1948. *The Plague*. London: Penguin Random House.
- Chrichton, Michael. 1970. *The Andromeda Strain*. New York: Dell.
- Cullen, W; Gulati, G; and Kelly, B. D. 2020. "Mental Health in the COVID-19 Pandemic." *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine*, 113(5): 311-312. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/qjmed/hcaa110>
- Defoe, Daniel. 1900. *A Journal of the Plague Year*. London: J. M. Dent.

- Ferrante, Elenna. 2020. *The Lying Life of Adults*. (trans.) Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (trans.) Alan Sheridan. France: Pantheon Books.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. 2021. *Klara and the Sun*. UK: Faber and Faber.
- Latour, Bruno. 2020. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Paris: Polity Press.
- Ma, Ling. 2018. *Severance*. USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- MacKenzie, Debora. 2020. *Covid-19: The Pandemic that Never Should Have Happened and How to Stop the Next One*. UK: The Bridge Street Press.
- Mann, Thomas. 1990. *The Black Swan*. (trans.) Trask, Willard R. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2021. *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonisation*. New York; Columbia University Press.
- McCarthy, Cormac. 2006. *The Road*. USA: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Newitz, Annalee. 2019. *The Future of Another Timeline*. USA: Tor Books.
- Robinson, Kim Stanley. 2020. *The Ministry for the Future*. USA: Orbit Books.
- Sontag, Susan. 1978. *Illness as Metaphor*. USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Thucydides. 1972. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. (trans.) Rex Warner. Baltimore, England: Penguin Books.
- Wright, Lawrence. 2021. *The Plague Year*. USA: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Zizek, Slavoz. 2020. *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

