



REMAPPING THE HUMAN'S ABSURD LIFE THROUGH LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

Jay Prakash Vishwakarma¹

Assistant Professor (French), School of Law, IMS Unison University

Prof. (Dr.) Dipa Chakrabarti²

Professor of French and Head, School of Languages, Amity University Rajasthan

Srikant Manubansh³

Assistant Professor, Amity University Patna

Email *: - Jayprakashbhu20@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Earth is full of natural resources and minerals, various flora, and fauna, and along with them, the homo sapiens or humans. In the lap of this bountiful nature, man has been living his life making use of these resources. But man is also indulging in malpractices such as uprooting trees and resorting to gadgets and modern technology that are inimical to the ecological balance of Nature; the reason for this arrogance may be their indifference, ignorance, or selfishness.

Authors and intellectuals wrote to disseminate an informed view to the readership. For instance, Albert Camus the French intellectual and Noble laureate of literature portrayed an epidemic condition of living in his book *The Plague* (Originally "La Peste" in French). In the novel the people of a city are all together living a life of bliss and ignorance, unaware of the natural hazards, meanwhile, the epidemic in *The Plague* of Albert Camus spread throughout the city and devastates all around. Huge suffering was caused to them, and the absurdity of the same has a parallel in the recent pandemic of Covid 19. The aim of this paper is to render a 'new' meaning to their mundane lives from which there is no chance of emancipation and liberation.

Keywords: Nature, Human, Life, The Plague, Absurdity, Covid 19

*Corresponding author

Jay Prakash Vishwakarma

Email: jayprakashbhu20@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a standstill, causing widespread panic, fear, and uncertainty. While it is a relatively new disease, it has already claimed the lives of millions of people across the globe. However, this is not the first time the world has faced a

deadly pandemic. In 1947, the French author Albert Camus wrote a novel called "The Plague," which depicted a town in Algeria ravaged by a deadly disease.

The coronavirus spread worldwide, impacting gender, race, class, the poor, migrant workers, international students, and others. This pandemic weakened all humans and created discrimination among the public itself. It has become a global challenge. In India, the first case of the epidemic was detected on 30 January 2020. World Health Organisation declared it a 'public health emergency of international concern on the same day. (Dasgupta et al. 373, 2021)

Regarding such a kind of situation, the French writer Albert Camus write a novel where he talked about a virus that spreads from animals to humans and ends up destroying half the population of a city, by name Oran, an Algerian city. This novel is called "La Peste" (The Plague). This virus is much like the present one Covid 19. The present Covid 19 put forward the most challenging global health issues. Whenever epidemics broke out, they affected humans, it forced people to change their habits, behaviour, thoughts, and perceptions toward nature. Such kind of disruptions can be seen in the aforesaid novel by the Nobel laureate of literature, Albert Camus.

"La Peste" (*The Plague*) is a philosophical reflection by Albert Camus written in the form of a novel. It was published in 1947 at the end of the Second World War. It is based on a fictional epidemic of plague in Oran, an Algerian town. Although it is fiction, it is not far from the present situation of covid-19. Both gravely affected humans and society. The main characters of *La Peste* make us identify with our fears and absurd desires. The characters' experiences are much like our own. There is a resemblance of social, chronological, and scientific factors too.

The death of rats in the streets, and on the playground symbolized the plague, (Chapter-I). In the beginning, when people got to know about the death of a rat, they ignored it totally (Chapter-1, the plague), which is the same as when the first case was found during covid-19, and the doctor advised to take precautions, but people ignored this virus. After a few days, we got heart-wrenching results. We got to know the worst news all around. The pandemic wave makes the death ratio fluctuate at the beginning. In the same way in *The Plague* of Camus, there were unknown deaths but as the story developed more deaths are added. This ratio can be understood in the given Fig-1.

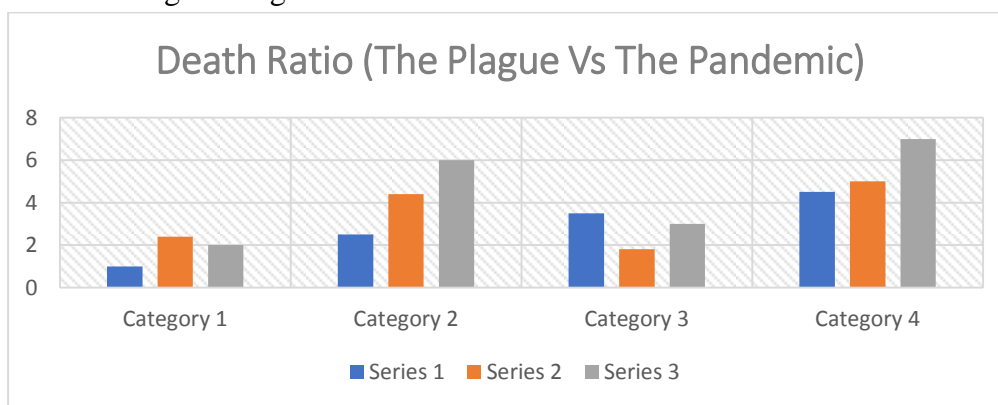


Fig-1 Death ratio category-wise, in *The Plague* (Camus) and Covid-19

In category 1st, we can see that at the beginning the death ratio of people in the novel was very less but after a few days passed, the death ratio got a high rate in category 2, as at the beginning of the novel, Dr. Bernard Rieux finds a dead rat lying on the landing following which an increasing number of rodents stagger out into the open and die. In the same way in a pandemic, the first wave of Covid-19 death ratio was up and down in category 3, but category 4 shows a high death ratio.

The quick spread of the virus accounted for the plague that is linked with the weather and pollution because when the weather gets hot, the disease gets worse when it gets cold, the disease becomes controllable. So, people start hoping that the weather would come to their help so that the disease gets finished. People get emotional, start crying, and are saddened about their life. The weather has nothing to do with the plague situations and the emotions of the people, neither that of the people of Oran nor that of the world. The virus is governed by science and rotates in its own space. The virus all-time creates its image as an enemy and always waging a war. This means the plague and pandemic are a kind of war that humans try to conquer and save their existence.

This notion can be seen in Albert Camus's work as during war a whole city gets locked, citizens get into their homes, and if someone is outside, s/he could be attacked by the enemy. During the plague, anyone who went outside, he or she got punished, attacked, or killed by the virus. This is the war against viruses, which are the most dangerous enemy. This war and plague locked the entire cities or the world. During this war, there were found two types of humans, one who get ready to fight against the enemy and the second who enjoys and merged with the enemy, for example, in the novel, *La Peste* Dr. Rieux, and Tarrou tirelessly work in the hospitals, trying to save some lives but on the other hand, Cottard who thrives during the plague feels himself fitter than ever in his whole life (*Le Peste*, 97). The paper thus wishes to make a sense of these unforeseen disasters when one has a feeling of being colonized by war or epidemics and both create pollution in nature which causes natural hazards. (Mehraj 119, 2021)

OBJECTIVE

- To study human life and the environment during the pandemic.
- To study the novel *The Plague* by Albert Camus.
- Comparative study of human life during the pandemic and *The Plague* to solve the remapping of an absurd life.
- To develop the methodology and sensitize towards nature and give purpose to an apparently meaningless life.

METHODOLOGY

The study of Camus' novel and that of nature and human life during the pandemic, throw light on the facts about human life and its relational aspects to nature and society. The following methods are suggested to solve the remapping of the absurd life of human beings with the help of literature:

Misfortunes of Life

This pandemic created an ecological threat; human life got threatened by the fear of the unstoppable virus. People got mental and lost their hope of living, somewhere some people committed suicide. It did not allow people to commute and those who had to do so for their living lost their jobs. Fear of death was pervasive during the Second wave of Covid-19. Such fear created a situation where a change in human behaviour became necessary (Jay et al 461, 2020). People were not capable of dealing with it. Hence, they lost to fight against this pandemic and become helpless for their own life.

The most distressful and miserable period came when hundreds of people got infected and died when there was a dearth of funeral pyres when relatives or family members were not allowed to perform the last rites for the deceased for fear of the spread of the virus. Such a condition can be seen in *La Peste*, as in Oran, where people got infected and died, the government ordered them to confine themselves to homes, the places of worship were evacuated, funerals were banned for fear of contagion, and many travellers got stuck in the locked-down places, not able to return to their hometown as during covid-19 (Kabel et al. 2, 2020). An outsider and journalist, Rambert was not able to return to his country to meet his beloved ones. It seems people were exiled. The media reported horrifying scenes with the bodies of the deceased burning on roads and floating on the river. People were dying one after another, hospitals running out of oxygen resulting in another series of deaths, and dead bodies piling up on vans meant for disposing off trashes; all this highlighted that life lost its value and meaning. Faced with such a catastrophic situation, people refused to learn; in the desire for long life, humans are afraid of death.

means nature knows how to balance itself, similarly in LA PESTE d'Albert Camus, Chapter-I, there is a scene where some rats are dead, and these rats are ignored. The dead rats are symbolizing that the human is completely dead, the human has lost his humanity because he does not care about nature, he does not care about the environment, if he cares, then men would have understood the dead rats in the beginning, similarly in today's Covid-19.

Vaccine And Medicine

When people got infected by a virus and died one after another, then it was very necessary to find out a vaccine. During the pandemic, public health measures were challenging in many places, due to overcrowded living conditions. the health-related services were disrupted. The government tried to provide financial aid and food security, but all were not sufficient to meet the demands of people who were affected and infected by the virus (Dasgupta et al 373, 2021). When the symptoms of the virus come to be known for the first time, vaccines and medicine became primordial.

Besides, in Albert Camus' *The Plague* existentialist ideas or the human condition of life came to the fore. Dr. Rieux understood that he, as one single person could not save the life of everyone. Social solidarity would be the need of the hour. We find an entire team getting into action: Besides Dr. Rieux, Dr. Castel, who identifies the virus as a plague, the journalist

Raymond Rambert and another visitor Jean Tarrou started working hand in hand in saving human life. People cooperated during the Covid-19 pandemic too to maintain their existence. Everyone ran after the vaccination to save him along with their loved ones (Owino 107-109, 2020). But to find out the new vaccine, it was necessary to taste whether the vaccine is relevant or vain. This vaccine research was so important but on whom should that vaccine be tested, in such a situation it was inevitable that some animal or some human may be harmed, then the question arises whether humans should be saved by harming others? Some questions cannot be denied answered. Not even in *The Plague* of Camus, or in the present pandemic of Covid 19.

If we talk about Camus', *The Plague* it is a natural affliction. To save from this virus, one must try to cure or isolate its victims, one must try to kill the virus so that men may live. In this story the enemy is not a human: the ethical judgment is that men should live than die. Human nature is all time opposite to his action, which means what he does, he does not get the result accordingly, in fact, he gets the opposite effect, hence, Tarrou, Paneloux, and Othon died but Rieux, Rambert, Grand, and Cottard were alive. All those who died from the plague were mostly thinkers, but the men who jumped into action held tight to a point of view about the nature of things that are live (George 292-303, 2013). The fact is that nature has its way and a true ethical stand; men whatever they do harm nature, consequently, men will get a bad result because nature is a science, and it knows how to make the calculation.

Albert Camus put science before the human tragedy. Science can transform complex phenomena into fundamental principles. It reduces the actual difference into universal laws. So, the scientific invention is medicine, this medicine has been particularly to reduce or control diseases. Which is made for humans, animals, and trees mean for all leaving creatures. It assumes that the human body can be diagnosed and treated according to disease. That's why medical inquiry and practice have continued to prevent human environmental and social damage.

To find medicine for the virus is heroic work. In this regard, it was necessary to find out the vaccine to cure the patients, but during the test, a political clash takes place. After all, Camus created the character of a Doctor like Dr. Rieux who is not only the protagonist of the novel and a symbol of science but also a voice against pathetic social systems. Hence Camus believes in the humanitarian gesture to civilize. In this regard, psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon appreciated Camus for being contemporary. Fanon was a practicing psychiatrist and understood the suspect position of colonial medicine. He had experience working with the French medical establishment in Algeria. This indicates that Albert Camus's work is always for modern society and science. (Lund, 134-136, 2011)

Sin And Pollution

After all, it is a very important question whether the virus is a cause of sin or pollution? As, during the pandemic and lockdown, it has been seen that the quality of air, water, weather, and habitat much improved. It balances much of the global growth from which everyone got benefited. After all, people think that this plague and pandemic are manifestations of Sin,

Even, in the novel Albert Camus's *The Plague*, there is a notion of sin or collective pollution that was at the heart of the problem of the city of Oran. The visitors stopped to visit the city once they get infected. (George 292-303, 2013)

It is also said that the virus is nonetheless natural pollution that spread all around the city. This inspired fear in the mind of the habitants of Oran. It is not sin or evil of men who did any kind of crime or injustice to someone; it is a kind of act, or malpractice that imbalanced ecology, and polluted the environment by installing heavy industry and inventing new chemical elements for modern society. People, at the cost of luxury living, caused destruction and gave birth to a new and uncontrolled virus in the world. This means it is a kind of pollution, which is the consequence of actions in the world of external events. It also operates with indifference. The people of Oran who died from the plague seem to be "punished" for no readily determinable reason. This sin is nothing but an infection that passes from one to the other.

According to WHO report In India, from 3 January 2020 to 5:24 pm IST, 11 July 2022, there have been 43,639,329 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 525,454 deaths in Fig-2.

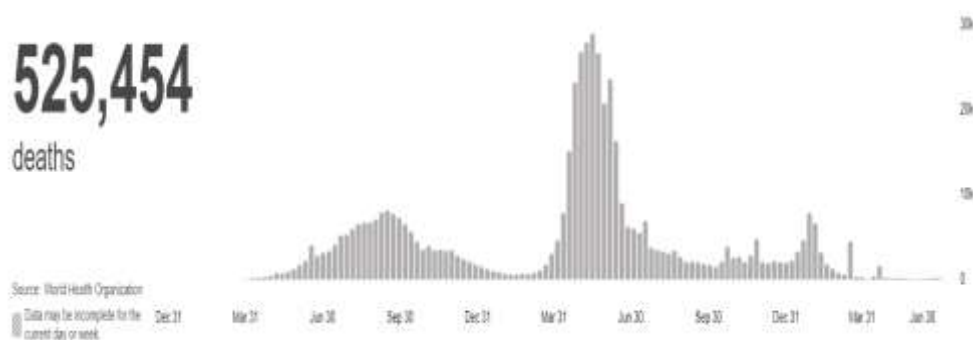


Figure-2 Data of death people because of the pandemic

<https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/in>

Yet the WHO does not know how many people will die or will be infected after the invention of the vaccine. WHO states that “we do not yet understand, and we are still researching how to treat? It is very difficult to estimate the potential risk of the covid-19 human challenge in the study. This WHO statement about research leads us toward science not mythology. This also indicates that neither the covid-19 nor the plague in Albert Camus’ novel, is a sin but a kind of pollution (Robertson 2, 2020). The pollution was produced by human malpractice of nature.

Lockdown And Environment

COVID-19 was first reported in December 2019 in Hubei Province, China, and afterward, it was declared a pandemic by WHO (Montoya et al 888, 2020). It was the rapid and disastrous spread of the virus that infected humans but gave life to the environment. Humans were

facing a high prevalence of chronic diseases and mental health illnesses, and a higher rate of viral illness and death which compelled them to get themselves isolated. In the novel, *The Plague* people got isolated and quarantined too. During the entire pandemic, women, and minorities face hazards.

But it is a fact that the global pandemic has improved the health system, science, innovation, and health research. This lockdown played a major role in improving environmental conditions. During the pandemic, the worldwide lockdown had an immense negative impact on the world's economy, industry, transport, tourism, hospitality, construction, etc (Sarkodie et al 5009, 2020), but the environment saved itself from the huge anthropogenic pressure.

The lockdown reduced the level of pollution, it was accounted that the carbon emissions have reduced respectively by 30% and 25% due to the industrial shutdown. This means that the pandemic created a golden opportunity to analyze the anthropogenic intervention on qualitative degradation of environmental components. WHO as per 2016 reports says that deaths from air pollution are 7.6% of all fatalities worldwide (Rizou et al 7, 2020), hence such a reduced pollution level would help nature to restore itself and help people to get fresh air and breathe deeply.

Such incidents can be seen in *The Plague* of Albert Camus, habitants of Oran get infected by the plague, but the environment gets free from all kinds of pollution, like air pollution, water pollution, industrial pollution, food pollution, and many kinds of disease which used to affect the nature. (*The Plague*, Chapter II)

When Noise intensity was recorded through the digital noise level analyzer, it was accounted for in a common situation from 8 am to 4 pm 35% to 68% which means the noise level is highly hazardous for human health (WHO, 2011), (Mishra et al 6). But during the lockdown, the noise level was quite normal like in the hilly area where there is nothing but peace and greenness.

Before the lockdown, the intensity of noise is very high but after the lockdown, it decreased. In the residential area, noise intensity is high but in the commercial and industrial areas, which are shut down, after lockdown between zero to six. The water of the river was polluted by dust through air movement and drainage water discharge to river water which causes the water quality parameters. When water quality samples have been collected from different places like the Damodar River of West Bengal in India and tested total dissolved solids, and dissolved oxygen, the reports of water quality permissible limits in pre lockdown period. During the lockdown, water quality is significantly improved. Its TDS was reduced from 2457 to 987. (Pal 8)

Before the lockdown when all the industries were in the operational state, the effect was recorded, and it was found hazardous to the environment and human health. The industry which crushes stone all time emits a huge volume of dust into the atmosphere, contaminating air and water quality. It is accounted that a particulate matter concentration above 100, harms human health (WHO, 2006). For example, inhaling dust particles for a long time often creates respiratory diseases, which means it invites death (WHO, 2006). For example, 29% of lung

cancer deaths, 24% of stroke deaths, 25% of cardiac disease death, and 43% of other lung diseases, are reported to be caused by air pollution. It is also found that because of air pollution, there are 26% of deaths from respiratory illness, 25% of deaths from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and 17% of deaths from ischemic heart and stroke (WHO, 2020). If we compare the death rate due to Covid-19, we find that death due to pollution is higher than the covid-19 death rate. (Mandal et al 8).

Overall, the integration of these two disciplines can offer a new perspective on the human experience, leading to a remapping of our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Literature and science have contributed to our understanding of the absurdity of human existence that we can use this understanding to reshape our lives. The paper concludes with a discussion of the potential benefits of this interdisciplinary approach, including increased empathy, improved mental health, and a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness with the world around us.

RESULT AND CONCLUSION

The diseases have had a significant impact on society, causing widespread panic, fear, and uncertainty. However, while COVID-19 is a deadly disease, The Plague is far more deadly, with a mortality rate of up to 90%. Furthermore, while there are treatments available for COVID-19, there is no cure for The Plague.

As humans and nature have always been different from each other. If something happens to humans, nature will remain, but if nature is destroyed then it is difficult for humans to survive. Maybe their existence will disappear forever. Humans completely depend on nature whereas nature is self-sufficient. Although knowing all the coins of nature, man is destroying it. When nature is repeatedly ambushed, it loses its balance. For which no one else must suffer but the human himself must suffer. Whether it is Corona or *The Plague* of Albert Camus, it is all toxic pollution created by humans.

During the pandemic, everyone saw the havoc of nature. This disastrous nature imprisoned all human beings like the prisoners in their homes. It has completely changed the way of living. It made away loved ones from loved ones. Furthermore, it shattered human life. Some died of hunger, some died of disease, and some died without medicine. Dead bodies were falling one after another. These all lead that life is absurd. Seeing all this, Man was ashamed of his misdeeds. Humans had lost all hope of living. Similarly, in Albert Camus's novel, people had given up hope of living. Eventually, some time passes. Slowly, humanity also woke up and everyone took part in saving each other's existence. Slowly everything improved and humans started wishing to live again and started remapping their absurd life from meaningless to meaningful.

Works cited and bibliography:

- Dasgupta, Satarupa, et al., "We Are Helpless, Hopeless and Living in Despair': Impact of COVID-19 on the Overall Health and Well-being, and Participation of the Transgender Community in India" *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, pp. 373, DOI: 10.1177/25166026211050743, 2021

- George, Kateb, “Camus La Peste: A Dissenting View, Symposium:” *A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literature*, 17:4, pp. 292-303, DOI: 10.1080/00397709.1963.10732791, 2013
- Jay, & Van Bavel, “Using social and behavioral science to support COVID-19 pandemic response” *Nature Human Behaviour*, DOI: 10.1038/s41562-020-0884- 460 – 466, 2020
- Kabel, A., & Phillipson, “Structural violence and hope in catastrophic times: from Camus’ The Plague to Covid-19” *Institute of Race & Class*” pp. 2, DOI:10.1177/0306396820974180, 2020
- Lund, Giuliana, “A Plague of Silence: Social Hygiene and the Purification of the Nation in Camus's La Peste, Symposium:” *A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literature, Vol. 65, Taylor & Francis Group*, ISSN:1931-0676, pp. 134-136, DOI: 10.1080/00397709.2011.573737, 2011
- Mandal, I., & Pal, S. “The COVID-19 pandemic persuaded lockdown effects on the environment over stone quarrying and crushing areas” *Science of The Total Environment*, pp. 8, DOI: 10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.139281, 2020
- Mehraj, M. “It’s Life, That’s All: Albert Camus’ the Plague. Vantage:” *Journal of Thematic Analysis*, 2(1): 117-120, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52253/vjta.2020.v02i01.08>, 2021
- Mishra, A., Das, S., Singh, D. et al. “Effect of COVID-19 lockdown on noise pollution levels in an Indian city: a case study of Kanpur.” *Environ Sci Pollut Res* 28, 46007–46019, pp. 06, DOI: 10.1007/s11356-021-13872-z, 2021
- Montoya-Barthelemy et al. “COVID-19 and the Correctional Environment: The American Prison as a Focal Point for Public Health” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, pp. 888, DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2020.04.001, 2020
- Owino, Stephen O. "Rereading Albert Camus the Plague During a Pandemic: An African’s Review," *The Journal of Social Encounters: Vol. 4: Iss. 2*, 107-109. https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol4/iss2/11, 2020
- Pal, S., Mandal, “Impacts of stone mining and crushing on environmental health in Dwarka river basin” *Geocarto International*, pp. 08, DOI: 10.1080/10106049.2019.1597390, 2019
- Rizou, M., et al. “Safety of foods, food supply chain, and environment within the COVID-19 pandemic.” *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, pp. 07, DOI: 10.1016/j.tifs.2020.06.008, 2020
- Robertson, Roland, “Humanity for itself? Reflections on climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic” *Globalizations: Tylor & Francis*, pp. 02, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2020.1842684, 2020
- Sarkodie, S. A., et al. “Global assessment of the environment, health, and economic impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)” *Environment, Development, and Sustainability*, pp. 5009, DOI:10.1007/s10668-020-00801-2 , 2020
- World Health Organization, WHO Health Emergency Dashboard (Covid-19) <https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/in>