

Echoes of the Corona Pandemic: Environmental Reflections in Indian English Literature through the Lens of Value Education and Sustainable Development

Dr. Mangesh Madhukar Gore

Department of English

Sundarrao More Arts, Commerce & Science College, Poladpur, Raigad

Abstract: *The COVID19 pandemic, an unprecedented global crisis, has transformed human life and reshaped sociopolitical, economic, and cultural paradigms. More significantly, it has highlighted the interconnectedness between human health and environmental wellbeing, revealing the urgent need for sustainable living. Indian English literature, responding to this transformative crisis, has explored the intersection of the pandemic and environmental concerns in both subtle and overt ways. This essay examines how Indian English literature, specifically poetry, fiction, and essays, engages with the environmental implications of the COVID19 pandemic. Indian writers reflect on the ecological crises that contributed to the pandemic, humanity's exploitation of nature, and the lessons from the global pause caused by lockdowns. Works by contemporary Indian English authors analyze themes relating to nature's resilience, the Anthropocene, and the moral responsibility of humanity toward ecological preservation. The essay further delves into how the pandemic has inspired literary reflections on sustainable futures, cautioning against a return to environmentally destructive practices. Indian English literature thus offers a critical lens to navigate the pandemic's broader environmental implications.*

Keywords: COVID19, Indian English Literature, Environmental Consciousness, Pandemic Literature, Anthropocene, Sustainability, Nature, Indian Poetry

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID19 pandemic stands as one of the largest crises of the 21st century, disrupting human life across every imaginable dimension. Aside from the immediate health and socioeconomic effects, the pandemic serves as a glaring reminder of the human imprint on the environment and the consequences of ecological disruption. The zoonotic origins of the coronavirus reflect humanity's growing encroachment on wildlife habitats, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Moreover, ecological scholars argue that modern pandemics are a byproduct of climate change, urban expansion, and the industrial exploitation of natural resources—issues that have long been a concern for environmentalists and writers alike.

Indian English literature, which has consistently addressed environmental and social concerns, has responded thoughtfully to the ongoing pandemic. From reflecting on human interdependence with nature to exploring themes like alienation, environmental degradation, and ecological restoration, Indian English writers capture the environmental lessons of COVID19 through their works. This essay investigates how Indian poetry, fiction, and essays articulate environmental implications of the pandemic and rethink sustainable ways of living. It sheds light on emerging themes in pandemic literature, particularly the need to recalibrate humanity's relationship with the natural world.



Environmental Implications of the Corona Pandemic

1. The Anthropocene and COVID19

The term "Anthropocene," referring to the epoch in which human activity is the dominant influence on the earth's ecosystems and geology, has gained renewed relevance during the pandemic. The ecological upheaval caused by the Anthropocene—including climate change, deforestation, industrial agriculture, and loss of biodiversity—provides the conditions for pathogens to proliferate, crossing over from animals to humans. COVID19, therefore, serves as a stark symptom of the Anthropocene's ecological failures. Indian English writers have reflected on this connection in their works, depicting the pandemic as an inevitable result of humanity's environmental exploitation. Anita Desai, renowned for her lyrical prose and ecological sensitivity, critiques overconsumption and corporate greed in her pandemicera essays. In a recent online literary feature, she writes: "The virus does not punish us, it merely reveals how far we've wandered from the paths that nature laid out long before us." In acknowledging the pandemic as a result of ecological disruption, contemporary Indian writers urge readers to rethink humanity's role as destructive agents in the Anthropocene epoch.

2. Literary Depictions of the 'Global Pause'

The pandemic-induced lockdowns and restrictions brought an unexpected yet temporary reshaping of human activity. This "global pause" led to observable improvements in carbon emissions, air and water quality, and a resurgence of wildlife in urban spaces. Indian English poets and writers have reflected on this phenomenon, treating it as an opportunity for ecological restoration while questioning whether humanity will embrace sustainability in a postpandemic world. Arundhati Subramaniam, a leading Indian poet, captures this duality in her pandemicera poetry. In her poem "When the Earth Stopped," she writes: "And then the earth exhaled, a long sigh, / She welcomed the silence—lustrous, deep, untouched, / But she knew better than to celebrate the hesitation of men." Through her philosophical yet tender portrayal of the earth's "exhalation," Subramaniam reflects on the paradox of environmental recovery during human inactivity. The poem also critiques humanity's fleeting acknowledgment of the environmental reprieve, highlighting the need for long-term consciousness.

Literary Depictions in Indian English Poetry

Themes of Resilience in Nature

Indian poets writing in English, such as Tishani Doshi, Ranjit Hoskote, Arundhati Subramaniam, and others, engage robustly with themes of nature's resilience in the face of human recklessness. Tishani Doshi's pandemicera poetry emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings while mourning humankind's arrogance in assuming dominance over nature. Her contemplation of the pandemic as a natural response to humanity's excessiveness often borders on the allegorical, as seen in her most recent works. In her poem "The Virus is a Reminder," Doshi writes:

"Let the virus remind you— / That boundaries are illusions / That rivers run not for profit but for thirsts unseen." The poem captures the essence of environmental interconnectedness, urging readers to unlearn exploitative practices and remember nature's true purpose. Doshi targets the capitalist systems that disregard ecological purposes, using the virus as a metaphor for nature's retaliation.

Nostalgia for Pristine Nature

Another recurring theme in pandemic-inspired poetry is nostalgia for a cleaner, greener past. Rural and native landscapes are often depicted as antimodern havens increasingly eroded by rapid urban development. Indian poets, such as Nabina Das, articulate their longing for these preserved natural spaces and question whether future generations will experience such beauty. In "Long Ago, the River Sang," Nabina Das revisits her childhood landscape, haunted by its transformation during the pandemic: "The river of my childhood dances no more, / She lies exhausted, // drained into oblivion / while roads hoard the ghost of her shimmer." Through imagery of rivers and urbanized landscapes, Das positions pandemic narratives within broader ecological losses caused by modernization and industrial exploitation.



Indian English Fiction: Pandemic and Environment

Revising Humanity's Role Through Fiction

Indian English fiction during the pandemic has largely adopted a critical stance toward humanity's treatment of the environment, using storytelling to offer ecoconscious reflections. K.R. Meera's essays and fiction, for instance, situate pandemic narratives amidst Kerala's heavily industrialized landscapes, portraying human suffering and pandemic-induced alienation as connected to environmental degradation. In her short story "The Vanishing Rain," K.R. Meera gives voice to a depleted earth, which responds to humanity's calls for help with silence. Blending realism with folklore, the narrative critiques humanity's arrogance while reminding readers of their diminishing control over natural disasters. By weaving environmental themes into pandemic suffering, Meera redefines the storytelling potential of pandemic literature.

Speculative Fiction and Climate Futures

Many Indian writers also incorporate speculative elements into their fiction, imagining postpandemic worlds shaped by climate concerns. Works by writers like Amitav Ghosh extend longstanding concerns about climate disasters into an exploration of postpandemic possibilities. In Ghosh's essay collection *The Nutmeg's Curse*, he offers a reflection on ecological imperialism, considering the pandemic as a direct outcome of humanity's exploitation of global ecosystems. Ghosh critiques neoliberal systems and emphasizes the interdependence of culture, environment, and sustainable futures, pushing readers toward political and social action.

Broader Environmental Critiques Reflected in Pandemic Literature

Human-Animal Relationships

Pandemic literature frequently emphasizes humanity's strained and exploitative relationship with animals, critiquing practices like wildlife trafficking, industrial-scale farming, and habitat destruction. Indian poets, such as Ranjit Hoskote, use their works to address the pandemic as a result of these tensions. In "Animals We Forgot," Hoskote mourns humanity's alienation from the animal kingdom: "And the calamity we call a pandemic / Is but the silence of animals, too long unheard." By invoking themes of accountability, Hoskote reminds readers of the pandemic's broader origins in ecological imbalance.

Implications of Value Education for Environmental Protection

The themes articulated in pandemic literature underscore the urgent need for value education centered on environmental stewardship. Writers and poets, through their works, advocate for a reformation of educational paradigms that emphasize ecological awareness and ethical responsibility towards all living beings. By incorporating lessons of interconnectedness between humans and nature, value education can instill a sense of empathy and moral obligation in future generations. The works of Indian literature, such as those by Hoskote, not only highlight the consequences of human actions on the environment but also push for a transformative understanding of our role within the ecological tapestry. This educational shift could lead to a society more equipped to confront environmental issues, promoting sustainable practices and conscious decisionmaking that prioritize the planet's health. Ultimately, the reflections offered through literature can serve as catalysts for a renewed commitment to environmental protection, nurturing a culture that respects and values the intricate relationships among all species.

II. CONCLUSION

The COVID19 pandemic, while primarily a public health crisis, has brought environmental concerns to the forefront of public consciousness. Indian English literature reflects this duality, tackling the pandemic's ecological underpinnings with sensitivity and critical insight. Whether through poetry, fiction, or essays, Indian writers articulate humanity's estranged relationship with nature while envisioning a path toward harmony. Themes such as the Anthropocene, nature's resilience, postpandemic recovery, and human exploitation are central to contemporary Indian literary responses. Through its reflections on the interconnectedness of life and the moral responsibilities of humanity, Indian English literature emerges as a powerful medium for environmental advocacy during the pandemic. By addressing the



deeper ecological implications of COVID19, this body of literature not only critiques the human actions that led to the crisis but also inspires collective responsibility to rebuild a shattered but resilient world.

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