

**LITERATURE AND HAPPINESS: DISCOURSES ON PANDEMIC,
ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH**

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Abstract

A literary product can be an outcome of a happy or a sad situation .It is a creativity to view things from a higher or deeper instance, and test one's mind and inclination towards those guiding forces that diagnose one's adherence to the balancing of life in its modes and forms of struggles, trials and tribulations. Literature and artistic expressions soothe one's mind, and provide a space to be happy, and creative, or may offer certain interrelated situations towards new possibilities, alternatives and options that show motivation to live with life, and bring sustenance to it. Pandemic COVID-19 has brought such a devastating situation on the planet earth that every second human impulse is so horrified that it encourages an individual mind and a system to experiment, and to come up with something that can help to survive or find an opportunity in making oneself happy, for it is the happiness that ultimately takes away all worries and negativity from life. It is the happiness and creativity that brings hope to the growth of mankind. It is important to understand and space happiness specifically in tough times or in a time of a crisis as of COVID-19 pandemic. The different phases of lockdown and unlock have given growing importance to the thought processes that deal with novelty by creating new things, experimentation and discoveries, and the motivation to live life in its best moments. This paper offers a discussion on the trajectories of health, happiness and environment in socio-cultural and literary discourses with reference to COVID- 19.

Key Words: Literature, COVID-19, Pandemic, Health, Happiness, Environment, Literary Discourses, Tennyson, Chekhov ,Vishaad , *The Plague* , T.S. Eliot .

Literature and artistic expressions are the tendencies to generate and recognize behaviours, patterns, habits, set ups and related ideas that may be useful in entertaining others and ourselves. Let's say ,“Ulysses”, a poem written in 1833 and revised in 1842, is Alfred Lord Tennyson's reworking of the saga of an ancient hero in Homer's *Odyssey* ,“and the medieval hero in Dante's *Inferno*. Ulysses” refers to the Roman form of the Greek “Odysseus”. Homer's Ulysses learns from a prophecy that he will take a final sea voyage after killing the suitors of his wife Penelope . The details of this sea voyage are described by Dante in his *Inferno*. Homer's Ulysses is restless, has a desire to gain and add to his experiences of life

from the world outside. Dante's Ulysses dies while he was on a sea voyage sailing in search of knowledge. Tennyson combines the two figure into one to have one Ulysses who has worked with all vigour, energy and strength in doing good to the welfare of his people and kingdom . He has handed over his prosperous and happy kingdom to his worthy son Telemachus, who is competent enough to continue his legacy and would bear his responsibility in the best possible manner and fruit-growing conduct and decisions. Ulysses is now old, tired and aged, yet very hopeful. He may have gone weak in physique but stands strong in will and mind. He has yearning for the new discovery, some experimentation to be taken anew, some new creativity, something that keep him still young and fresh in will and mind, something that shall be worthy of his existence, a plan, a project, a vision, and a thirst for knowledge and creativity that could be capable of bringing criticism and sustenance to life. In the last stanza, the poet says, "Come, my friends, 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world./Push off, and sitting well in order smite/The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds/To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths/Of all the western stars, until I die./It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:/It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles." (Tennyson, "Ulysses").

It is a creativity towards alternate possibilities that may prove to be worthy of solving the problems and trickles of life. Tennyson's poem is a great work of literature that speaks volumes on the happiness that are found in the working, following one's heart and mind. It further elaborates on the joys that come on surface while someone is engrossed in activities and actions that satisfy one's life before moving into another life after death. His plan to take up another journey towards something new, new knowledge, mysterious and hidden land would be a new challenge that shall test and help him to set standard goals for his quality life in the same way he has been earlier standardizing his living and his kingdom, and in the same spirit he would make up for a fine balance of his strength and mind towards bringing criticism and sustenance to his life. Tennyson's Ulysses is also elevated in spirit, heart and mind towards contributing to the life although he being in his aging days . Consequently the poet results to offer the world a marvelous piece of his craftsmanship that inspires to create and love the world around, and keep working and moving. This poem holds yet another significant cultural note and tone. It reflects upon Tennyson's own personal journey of grief when he lost his dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833. It was composed during the first few weeks after Tennyson learned the sad demise of his friend Arthur Hallam. Like *In Memoriam*, "Ulysses" is also an elegy for his deeply cherished friend. Ulysses, symbolizes the sad, melancholic and grieving poet, who takes the resolution ,then, again, to move forward in spite of the odd and the loss that he had to face, knowing that "death closes all" ("*In Memoriam*" ,line 51). *In Memoriam* ends up as "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," and sums up all in a crisp and concise tale that defines the beauty of human life on the earth. Like "Ulysses", "Tithonus" is another poem by Tennyson among the set of four

works including “Morte d’Arthur,” “Ulysses,” and “Tiresias” ,that he wrote shortly after the death of his dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam’s in 1833. The contrast of the discussion lies in finding the young Hallam being granted youth without immortality, and Tithonus is granted immortality without youth. The recurring themes of age and mortality seem to be inspired from Greek mythology, quite similar to Tennyson’s mouthpiece Ulysses in his dramatic monologues in the poem “Ulysses”. Tithonus desires to live life to the fullest. His lust for youthful energy and vigour made Aurora to make up a request to Zeus to grant him immortality, and Zeus did the same. However, she forgets to procure for him an eternal youth, so Tithonus with the passage of time became a decrepit old man who seeks death. Aurora finally transformed him into a grasshopper to relieve him of his pain, sufferings and sad existence. The poem speaks on the source of suffering, those earnest desires and time references that subjected Tithonus to the ravages of time. It reflects upon the dying call and the death as a significant stoppage to happiness. We see it in the lines of “Tithonus”,

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,/The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,/Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,/And after many a summer dies the swan./Me only cruel immortality/...Of happy men that have the power to die,/And grassy barrows of the happier dead./Release me, and restore me to the ground;/Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave. (Tennyson, “Tithonus”)

Appropriately, in depicting the futility of eternal life without youth, energy, spirit, health and strength, the poet in *In Memoriam* ,draws upon a timeless figure and a character that communicates the beauty of human life and significant death that signs off yet a brilliant creativity and work of art and literature to hopes and survival in set limits of challenges and struggles involved in one’s life.

Basically, any kind of literature or literary artifact is a reflection on human behaviour that counter, or better to say is our response towards a stimuli in different emerging situations. A literary product can be an outcome of a happy or a sad situation, and stand as the testimony of the human endeavor. It is a creativity to view things from higher or deeper instances, and tests one’s mind and inclination towards those guiding forces that diagnose one’s adherence to the balancing of life in its modes and forms of struggles, trials and tribulations. Literature and artistic expressions alleviate one’s mind, and provide a space to be happy, and perhaps creative, or may be an interrelated situation towards new possibilities, alternatives and options that keep the motivation to live with life, and bring sustenance to it.

Pandemic COVID-19 has brought such a devastating situation on the planet earth that every second human impulse is so horrified that it encourages an individual mind and a system to experiment and to come up with something that can help to survive or find an opportunity in making oneself happy, for it is happiness that ultimately takes away all worries and negativity from life. It is the happiness and creativity that brings hope to the growth of mankind. It is important to understand and space happiness specifically in tough times or in a time of crisis as that of COVID-19 pandemic. The different phases of lockdown and unlock

have given growing importance to the thought processes that deal with novelty; creating new things, experimentation and making discoveries, and to offer motivation to live life in its best moments. It is not out of money making inspirations, competitive spirit, and the desire to set targets or specific purpose but it is out of motivation and elevation towards engineered solutions, transforming human activities and human existence as worthy of being rewarded with the best ever opportunity. It is appropriate to discuss the “flow” of emotions. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian psychologist has coined the term “flow” to suggest the idea that “real contentment comes from being so fully emerged in what we are doing we cease to be aware of our own existence”, i.e. it is an idea about total engagement. The idea of flow has been used as a counter argument towards the flow of life that suddenly came to a halt when COVID -19 started eating the man on earth.

The different phases of lockdown were not simply the phases for relaxing or being passive to situation but instead came to us as a challenge and prospect, where, in the terms of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, it is to stretch the mind and body to the maximum of the limit so as to run and to counter create these as the flow of being ‘criticism and sustenance to life’, where literature and literary artifacts could certainly find the scope of contributing to happiness. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov seems to filter the earthly roots of rejection, dejection, hopelessness, resignations, disappointments, alienation, sadness and grief that is so unsurpassed, and appears in an outstanding manner of portrayal in his characters especially in his short stories. In ‘The Lament’, it is heart touching to find Iona who laments his son’s death, “with an anxious and hurried look...searches among the crowds...to find whether there may be just one person who will listen to ...his trouble. Yet it is such an immense, illimitable grief. Should his heart break and the grief pour out, and yet no one sees it. It has managed to conceal itself in such an insignificant shell that no one can see it” (‘The Lament’ in *Forms of English Prose*, 125). Although the voice of the protagonist in ‘The Lament’ is not heard by the stakeholders concerned, yet, via the creative output of Chekhov is seen and spaced so beautifully, and heard by the world and its people. Based on Anton Chekhov’s short story *The Lament*, Ravindra Pratap Singh in his Hindi play *Vishad*, offers an aggrieved character Fazal, and a melancholic song in the background of the action, “sunane wala koi nahin hai, sabke sab jallad/ jahar mila hai un rangon mein/ jinse sab khel rahe hain faag,/aag laga de apne dil ko/phir tu laga de bahar aag”(19-20). Fazal, the ill-timed protagonist finds a resort to sustain and live with his unfortunate life and the loss of his son. Fazal finds the company of Ghunghroo, his horse, to be soothing, comforting and a companion sensitive to make up for a better living in the world around, “bane yeh maanush se acche,/ badhe dosti ka jab haath.”(22). Both Anton Chekhov and Ravindra Singh in different genres, one in short story and the other in a play, respectively, portray the art of sense, association and sensibility focusing human moods that go deep in psychological treatments of heart and mind that purge and purify human emotions. Chekhov and Singh being in the creative process of yet another

visionary force of elevation and energy shall hold the spirit to survival and hope, believing in a forward march.

We, the homo sapiens are the descendants of the ancestors who valued the novelty and always enjoyed being creative, knew how to defend themselves and their offspring, had immense capability to explore, learn and invent towards the unpredictable situations that threatened the survival. We share an ability to discover our plans and design, something new that could solve the complex problems of life, and feel to be the playful and sportive while employing and engaging our skills that make the state of mind towards a heightened sense of awareness. This, in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's terms, requires a healthy balance between the challenges that one faces, and the level of skills that allow to enter into the merging of action and awareness where human activity becomes an end in itself. The purpose of using Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow is to communicate that literature and artistic expressions have that motivation and spirit to live in a world, full of opportunities with flow. The condition is to work, think and act effortlessly to erase the distinction between work and play. This is not in want of success or fame but something more, and beyond it, wherein the process of ongoing enquiry and creativity literature becomes its own reward. Its dimensions strengthen happiness and creativity which are much needed affairs in a crisis situation as of COVID-19 pandemic. Further, it is appropriate to refer Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, when he says that, "the best moments in our lives are not the passive receptive relaxing times...the best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limit in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile." (p4).

Aristotle in 350 BC defined happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He said that happiness is the ultimate desire that human being seeks. He explains that one sought riches, honour, health, friendship not only for one's own sake but also in order to be happy. Aristotle used the term *eudaimonia*, which, in translation, appears as happiness or flourishing of an activity rather than an emotion or a state. The term *eudaimonia* is a classical Greek in root, and the dictionary explains it to be consisting of the parts - 'eu', i.e. good or well being and 'dimon' i.e. spirit or minor deity to mean one's lot of fortune. The extended meaning of the term lies in understanding a happy life. A happy life is a good life where a person has an opportunity to fulfil human nature in the best possible way. However, it is important to understand that this also pertains to the utilization of human capabilities through activities that shall be rationally appreciating, and so the evaluation of virtuosity, that is moral virtues automatically is to be looked for. COVID-19 pandemic is a situation of crisis where rational behavior of human activity and the related arguments become a relevant and significant point of discussion. How should human being behave, either individually or collectively, has become an important guide and a scepter in the realm of ethical behavior in such a situation, for instance the influence of culture on health system is varied and vast in terms of thought processes pertaining to collectivist or individualist approaches. Culture affects the perception of health, customs and behavior, illness and death, belief systems, causes of death

, approaches to health promotion , and , in fact the trajectories on how illness and pain are experienced and expressed where patients or the sufferers seek health or the types of diagnosis or treatment they prefer . This also means that both health professionals and the sufferers i.e. the patients are conditioned in their mindset by their respective cultures. So there are likely chances that cultural bias may consequently be very different as far as health related preference and perceptions are concerned. Now being aware of and negotiating such cultural bias are the skills that one needs to allow and incorporate this kind of awareness towards better health care systems, diagnosis and treatment planning that leads to higher rates of acceptance as part of behavioral stands and studies in the situation concerned. It would be appropriate here to refer Albert Camus' *The Plague*, where he embarks upon the cholera epidemic and bubonic plague that hit the French-Algerian city of Oran and its surroundings by disease several times, seem to serve the source material for his novel that got published in 1947. The plot of the novel is set in 1940's, where Camus scales a very large size of a horrifying epidemic sight devastating human condition. At one place, in the novel, Father Paneloux delivers a stern sermon, declaring that the plague is a punishment from God for Oran's sins, however, in an incident when M. Othon's little son died out of prolonged illness due to the plague, Dr. Rieux shouts at Paneloux that he was an innocent victim. Father Paneloux goes deeply shaken and saddened at the boy's death, delivers a second sermon where he alters the first sermon that he had delivered earlier. Paneloux declares that the inexplicable deaths of innocents communicate the people to make choices between believing everything and believing nothing about God. So the faith in the institutional set up and religious faith seem to be shaken up. The end of the novel- *The Plague* , suggests a never ending war and a fighting spirit, an anti-plague efforts, sanitation, safety and health measures, working collectively and consciously towards sustaining life.

In 2004, Darrin Mc Mahon claimed that, "over times the emphasis shifted from the happiness of virtue to the virtue of happiness." (Darrin,5). In a discourse on happiness, it becomes relevant here to understand the element of happiness in one's life specifically during a crisis situation as of pandemic COVID-19. It is the happiness that has led people to find opportunities, options and alternatives to experiment with those that is available during a crisis situation to improve upon the psychology, and remain intact to the roots of bliss that can inspire to live life, else a high tide situation of a pandemic has an uncontrollable sway of waves where all hopes to live life shattered before one actually encounters this deadly disease. Half the marathon is won out of hopes and lights, and it elevates and inspires the heart, mind and soul to enjoy the present and to seek opportunities to live further.

In a contagious environment nothing is more contagious than the negativity, depression, anxieties, morbid state of mind and loss of hope. It is , therefore, important to understand the worth of mankind's existence on this green planet earth .The world literature(s), religion and culture have much to offer as part of creativity and happiness that one can experiment with to come into a delightful mood, live and fighting strain that has

force towards righteous deeds and lesser wrongs in order to intoxicate the joys and beauty in life as recognized and much needed worthy goals to spread desire to live life. In Buddhist teachings, happiness is the central theme. The noble eight paths suggested there, lead its practitioners to attain Nirvana, which can be understood as the state of everlasting peace and freedom from suffering. Buddhism has been seen to encourage the generation regarding love, kindness and compassion towards the welfare of all beings. A similar connotation appears in the *Advaita Vedantic* philosophy of Hinduism where the ultimate goal of life is happiness. The philosophy says here that the duality between *Atma* and *Brahma* is transcended, and one realizes oneself to be the self in all, and in this state, there exists nothing which is unpleasant and meaningless. One starts understanding the ultimate happiness in the service of God, while the Confucianism talks about greater self and the lesser self to understand the force that inspires one's actions towards righteous deeds to practice virtues and the pleasure that comes from the greater self, i.e. the moral self responsible for nourishing happiness as compared to the lesser self that is the physiological self.

According to the thirteenth century philosopher and theologian, Thomas Aquinas, "happiness consists in an operation of the speculative intellect: consequently happiness consists, principally in such an operation viz. in the contemplation of divine things." Aquinas says that, "the last end cannot consist in the active life which pertains to the practical intellect, therefore, the last and perfect happiness which we await in the life to come consists entirely in contemplation." (*Summa Theologiae*, 3). It denotes that the supreme delight lies in recognizing, understanding and reasoning the human complexities, its limitations and its transitory state. The best side and the form or manner of reception, perhaps, is the production of the literature that engages artistic and literary human activities that does a lot of contemplation that satiates emotions, needs and desires to achieve happiness and passion in life, for instance, *The Alchemy of Happiness* by Al-Ghazali, a Muslim Sufi thinker, is an exemplary manual of spiritual instructions with the power of contemplation as a way to happiness widely practiced throughout the Muslim world today.

Artistic expressions and literature has been a realization of varied emotional states that has strengthened human understands of joy, amusement, satisfaction, gratification, euphoria triumph and winning behavior. An artistic or literary activity as an indicative of happiness, is a matter to be examined in experiential and evaluative contexts. How good or bad one's experiences are in the context and moments can be a factor that can be evaluated. Some literatures and expressions focus on the hedonistic tradition of seeking pleasure and avoiding unpleasant experiences whereas some are the products of the eudemonic tradition of living life in a full swing and a deeply satisfying way. An artistic expression or a literary product is an outcome of encounters with unexpected positive events. It can be a recognition of a significant behavior and acceptance of a natural law or divine law whereas, there may be derivatives solely depicting the trials and tribulations for basic needs towards survival.

Artistic expressions and literary activities envision moments of extraordinary experiences, and transform to evoke or generate multiple profound moments to be recognized in life as of love, understanding, happiness or rapture or a brake or a crisis during which a person may feel more alive, complete, self sufficient and yet become a part of the world to exercise his or her competence and his or her role play in connecting with the human chain.

In 2012, the World Happiness Report was published basically on two variables - i.e. how happy one is with his or her life as a whole, and how happy one is in the current situation and on an analysis of this report one can say that happiness has been found to be quite stable over time. Some studies, for instance one by June Gruber (2018), a psychologist at the university Colorado suggests that seeking happiness can have negative effects, whereas a few earlier studies suggest that the psychological well being is experienced better by the people who are exposed to both positive and negative emotions. It becomes relevant to talk about Sigmund Freud (1930), who has said that we all strive to get happiness but the possibilities of achieving happiness are restricted because we humans are conditioned and made to derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from the stable state of things. Literature, therefore, is a resort, that captures and records human varied emotions that can be analysed to further the possible tradeoffs the happiness and meaning in life. The less choices of the available resources, constraints and restrains during any crisis situation or a pandemic engage people's mind and activities towards inventions, discoveries and experimentations that reflect upon the value judgment of human life, and gives key to the infinite aspects of working, arguing and writing multidimensional literature that has a power to assess into human life and expected behavioral stands towards the sustainable development that make up for a balance between man and nature.

A number of artistic expressions and literature have been reflected of the empirical researches that deal with the happiness factor that supported the contentions that in a democratic set of environment and society people are more satisfied, more generous, cautious of social safety net pro sensitive to working class, respecting labour market regulations, respecting associations, and vouching to the public policies that reduce poverty, independence and an egalitarian, economic and political indicators that allow to make choices for the wellbeing of public at large. Art forms and expressions have recorded that people make choices that have decreased their happiness while compromising with other important aims in order to meet economic and social needs specifically in any crisis situation. This, perhaps, is also suggestive of the alternatives that government should not decrease, available to any citizen for the purposes of keeping them toned with possible freedom of choices and flexibility during a pandemic situation as of COVID-19. This will be a contributing factor to the good mental health binding a state into good relationship with the citizens to welcome for the support and consent to let flourish any policy, rule or code that are likely to be framed and advanced in a crisis situation or a pandemic. The happiness and good go relationship between the state and its citizens go hand in hands towards maintaining

harmony and peace , and the citizens would then welcome the psychology and the socio-cultural narratives dictated to them during a crisis situation .A big corpus of literature and artistic expressions have elaborated the history of the world , different nations , concurring and catering the dire situations , and have emerged as strong constructs while fighting death, loss of life , loss of meaning in life, loss of hope and the spread of diseases challenging the existence of mankind. When we look at Indian culture , we find literature replete with health care beliefs and practices that allow the treatment and medicine as mixed fluid under a variety of medical systems with its root in our all religions .Behavioral expressions on our faith in *Yogsutra* or the other traditional forms of medicine such as Ayurveda , Yunani system and Homeopathy have largely produced a unique literature that therapeutically heals and treats the mind, soul and body in the realization of the purification much needed to be addressed in rooting out the deadly diseases as of the diseases spread during pandemic. Volumes of literature and different culture across the globe specifically Indian literature and culture have spoken on the rich treasure that nature has for the purposes of immunity boosters , pain relievers and antibiotic in technical terms to go with the disease free and happy life .Socio cultural and anthropological discourses have been relevant to the thought processes of the mind that culminate into creating a literature with monumental plans and projects that have laid the foundations for analyzing human conditions and activities that have survived the challenging and difficult times such as during the spread of pandemics as of plague , Spanish Flu, and COVID 19 today .

Litterateurs have sown the seeds of hopes and colours to everything that have been odd and black, to let people know the strength that lies in arts and expressions. It, therefore, becomes a pertinent and relevant discussion to revisit the works like, Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* ,William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* , S.T. Coleridge's 'Fears in Solitude' , P.B. Shelley's *Adonais* , John Leech's *The Court of King Cholera* , Makiia Loucier's *A Death –Struck Year* , Mary Bethkeane's *Fever* , Robin Cook's *Outbreak* ,T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Albert Camus' *The Plague* ,Stephen King's *The Stand* , the talks of Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to raise deliberations regarding those major portions and a corpus of other literatures which are written to understand the deadly havoc of pandemic and humans in quarantine .The genuineness of human emotions and human activities in other forms of portrayal and manifestation of socio- cultural and literary discourses is an obvious set back that strengthens the hopes and survivals .They pave way towards strategic maneuvers that cater to the understanding of life in a miniature in art and culture and open vast vistas of horizons to remain intact with happiness, and evolve oneself out of pain and suffering that any pandemic as of COVID -19 has thrown to the people's life .

The expansion of art, literature and culture since time immemorial in Indian systems and set ups have been largely a source of living life and mannerisms of tolerance as powerhouses that strengthen people physically and mentally .Our stories and trades of worshipping nature , the geography , the demography , the values , beliefs and norms reflect

upon a unique and diverse set of customs and traditions that can dictate our innovative adaptability and light heartedness in treading the path of challenging prospects of pandemic situations as of COVID-19.

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