

ULRICH BECK'S *RISK SOCIETY* AND THE SELECTED PANDEMIC LITERATURE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The present study deals with Ulrich Beck's Risk Society in relation to the selected pandemic literature. It aims at exploring the dangers of modern world exhibited in post-apocalyptic fiction in English. The study employed Beck's notion of risk society which demonstrates scientific and technological advancement resulting in terrors in today world. The study is qualitative one and analyzed through content analysis technique. It concluded that there are some terrible consequences often neglected during the blind run after progress and advancement and they happen later on as uncontrollable phenomenon.

Keywords: Pandemic, Risk Society, Literature, Modern World.

INTRODUCTION

Different pandemics have been occurring throughout human history that attracted the attention of biologists, scientists and environmentalists. At the same time these epidemics have also appealed to different literary authors and artists who have produced considerable works on pandemics. These epidemics are long literary traditions that enabled the artists to extract the best version so that these might seem universal for all ages. However, English literary artists have produced sufficient amount of literary texts in this context for awareness and therapeutic effect etc. In short, great art comes from the great tragedy. Some of the massive pandemics have been authorized by the renowned artists in the golden treasure. These awful collapses have caused worldwide chaos and mortality rate. Some of them includes: Greek literature, which reflects the strong bonding between plague and sin as Homer's *Iliad*. Whereas Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606) is a masterpiece which was composed when he was in quarantine from the plague. However, Jack London's *Scarlet Plague* (1912) witnesses the devastating and vulnerable effect of Red Death on bionetwork. Moreover, Jack London's *Scarlet Plague* witnesses the devastating and vulnerable effect of Red Death on bionetwork. According to L.Cilliers, the first documented outbreak of bubonic plague is "The Plague of Justinian (541-542) which spread massively throughout the Eastern Roman Empire. The Spanish *Lear Flu* (1918-1920 AD) caused by HINI influenza virus, affected the whole world and caused millions of deaths. The Yellow Fever (1648-1800 AD) exploded in Africa and wiped out maximum population of Africa. Thus, the virus transmitted by the bite of infected female mosquito. The Japanese Small Pox (735-737 AD) is a major small pox epidemic that plagued the entire Japan.

Besides, The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which was originally discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019, is the cause of the pandemic known as Covid-19 (2019-Present). Since then, it has spread over the

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globe, killing millions of people. Therefore, all these pandemics witness the catastrophes, and communal disruption. These diseases cause physical and mental collapse and pose risks to the entire world. Thus, these pandemics enable the artists to create the best arts for capturing the situation and for therapeutic process. The word 'Apocalypse' has its religious origin. It comes from the ancient Greek *apokalupsis* and translates as to reveal and unveil the true order (Heffernan 2008,4). Hence, all the post-apocalyptic writers and artists reveal the pandemics, their consequences and how they affect humanity and the bio-ecological system. The apocalypse of John (Bible, King James Version, and Revelation) signifies the end of the world. Apocalyptic work thereby, aims at revealing or disclosing something veiled. It is one of the genres of literature that exposes hidden information. Thus, apocalyptic writing contains prophetic vision, primarily of forthcoming collapse of the world and salvation of the virtuous. Apocalyptic artists anticipate the world that is being collapsed through various devastating means in their art. Lewis (1965) stands pioneer among modern critics of apocalyptic literature who terms the secular version of apocalypse as 'Ludicrous Catastrophe' (p.184). Therefore, apocalyptic literature deals with the collapse of civilization through pandemics, plagues, nuclear war or other general catastrophes. It includes texts including, Emily John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), Albert Camus' *The plague* (1947) Ling Ma's *Severance* (2018) and Stephan King's *The Stand* (1978).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ulrich Beck's 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992)' Risk society and reflexive modernization are some of the key concepts coined by German sociologist which not only circulates in scholarly community, but also among the intellectuals of entire world and in political circles. In reflexive modernization, hidden and potentials risks of modernization backfire on modernity. This article explores emergent bonds between the present policies and state failure and assess the potential for including risk analysis and early warning in emerging whole government approaches to the problem of state failure. The theoretical basis of Beck's 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992)' theory is embedded in the idea that modern societies are characterized by the presence of global hazards that cannot be fully controlled or predicted. These threats arise as a result of innovative technology at each walk of life, human error or negligence, natural catastrophes, industrialization, and globalization, and they pose important challenges to traditional forms of governance and social organization. Beck argues that the risks of modern society are diverse from those of the past because they are global in nature and can create impact on all individuals, regardless of their social status or geographic location. Beck also contends that the traditional forms of risk calculation and management, such as scientific expertise and political decision-making, are insufficient for dealing with these new forms of risk.

According to Beck, there are two distinct periods: the first corresponds to an industrial society and a class society, which he calls "primary modernization." The second period is that of a risk society, and we are said to live in a "reflexive modernity." In Beck's observation, the risk society is marked by a new form of reflexivity, in which individuals are forced to constantly reassess their relationship to risk and to take responsibility for their own safety and well-being. This reflexivity is both an individual and a collective phenomenon, as individuals are increasingly called upon to contribute in the management of risk through various forms of social action and political engagement. This leads to a new form of social inequality and a need for new forms of governance to manage and mitigate these risks. The idea of risk is closely linked to the notion of reflexive modernization, which can be defined as a methodical approach to addressing the unveiled hazards and suspicions generated by modernization. Risks, unlike previous hazards, are consequences that arise from the threatening impact of modernization and the worldwide spread of uncertainty, and they have political hitches.

Additionally, the process of modernization, which led to the breakdown of feudal society and the emergence of industrial society in the 19th century, is now causing the dissolution of industrial society and paving the way for a new form of modernity to take shape. Specifically, in the 19th century, modernization occurred in contrast to a traditional world characterized by moral values and a natural environment that was to be understood and controlled. As we stand at the dawn of the 21st century, modernization is currently eroding the very foundations of an industrial society, including its functional principles. Beck's central

argument is that what we are experiencing is not the conclusion, but rather the beginning of modernity, which goes beyond the traditional industrial model.

Simon (1992) claims in the research entitled as 'Ulrich Beck, Risk Society and the Media: A Catastrophic' that Beck has presented the idea of 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992)' on the map of wit and intellect; his social notion of current modern era and its pandemics production of hidden threats has appealed and gained the interest in Europe and beyond. This article suggests a critical representation of Beck's thoughts on the media in 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992)'. It indicates how these are beholden to his expanded social notional views of chronological exceptional nature of risks, process of reflexive modernization and opens all to let them engaged in criticism and discussion. Beck's theory negotiates to the current time situation and offers theoretical framework to mass communication researchers.

Discussion on Selected Post-Apocalyptic Work

The word 'apocalypse' derives from Greek word 'apokalupsis' which means to 'discover' or 'reveal'. In the context of religious literature, it refers to the revelation of divine knowledge or the end of the world as prophesied in the Book of Revelation in the Christian Bible. On the other hand, apocalyptic literature is a genre of writing that deals with the end of the world or the apocalypse. It is characterized by its vivid portrayals of catastrophic events, such as war, famine, plague and natural disasters, which are believed to signal the end of the world. This type of literature is often connected with religious and mythological traditions, and it has been found in various cultures throughout history. Apocalyptic literature often uses figurative language and imagery to convey its message, and it frequently includes prophetic or visionary elements. The literature often presents a stark contrast between the forces of good and evil, with a strong emphasis on divine intervention and judgment. Apocalyptic literature has been found in many different cultures and religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Despite its gloomy and often menacing themes, apocalyptic literature has also been used as a tool for optimism and motivation, as it often portrays a better future beyond the chaos and destruction. It has been a popular form of literature for centuries and continues to be relevant in modern times.

An apocalypse has a great significance in our traditional production. It refers to literary work that represents a devastating event leading to the end of the world and human civilization. Apocalyptic fiction has been an interesting and thought provoking genre for centuries, with its roots tracing back to ancient myths and religious texts that anticipated the end of the world. However, the modern history of apocalyptic fiction as we know it today can be traced back to the 19th century. One of the earliest works of modern apocalyptic fiction is Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* published in 1826. The novel tells the story of a survivor of a global pandemic that wipes out humanity. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a surge in apocalyptic and dystopian literature, reflecting concerns about the impact of industrialization, warfare, and political upheaval on society. The mid-20th century saw a rise in apocalyptic literature and the Cold War era in particular saw an increase in apocalyptic fiction, as people lived in fear of a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. This fear was reflected in literature, with novels such as Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, which depicts the aftermath of a nuclear war that has wiped out all life in the Northern Hemisphere.

In the 1960s and 1970s, ecological concerns also began to influence apocalyptic fiction depicting the consequences of ecological collapse. Recently, apocalyptic fiction has continued to be popular, with new themes emerging such as the hidden threats of global pandemics such as Mandel's *Station Eleven* ((2014) and the impact of innovative and artificial intelligence on society and 'The age of Miracles by Thompson Walker. Narratives of the destruction and collapse enhance the emphasis to the environment and the materialistic world, reaching beyond the limits of instant fiction and tales to let the audience involved on the effective level. This emphasis attains its influence by creating link of the narrative's plot to the per-apocalyptic world through the fragments that survive. This relationship is bonded between forgetting and remembering and to present the characters within the stories to their lost pasts.

Eileen (2022) in the article 'Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*; Existentialism and IR meet the post-apocalyptic pandemic novel' unveils the three layers of modern political science fiction: dystopian, existential and post-apocalyptic. It explores that Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* reveals social issues are

predominantly caused by modern technology and cultural interventions in the widespread surroundings. In addition to, this article analyzed that *The Last Man* is not only the first modern post-apocalyptic epidemic novel, but also an important source for the existentialist tradition. Shelley dramatizes how social clash can bring instability in relations, violence, and human made destruction like species extinction, epidemics and existential plague such as social distancing and dejection.

Meenapriyadharshini et al (2016) analyzed the two science fiction: *The Day of the Triffids*(1951) authorized by John Wyndham and *Planet of the Apes*(1968) penned by Pierre Boulle. This research paper has a glimpse them with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic concept which consists of a worldwide vulnerable threats and mainly focuses on climate variation, man-made events etc. Furthermore, it discovers the former science fiction narrative a plague of blindness that hits the entire population across the globe as innovation in the field of technology gives birth of aggressive species of planet. While the latter demonstrates modernity, through unveiling an updated future, which leads to a complete collapse for humanity. These two narratives expose that catastrophe might be man-made or natural but gives rise to risk and human decline.

N.A Alkhatatabi in his journal 'living the Moment during Pandemics with Reference to Jack's *The Scarlet Plague*' examines how individuals have cope with dreadful circumstances, anxiety and trauma during pandemics. The study illustrates Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* while applying the narrative analysis methodology and compares pandemics portrayed in the novel and vulnerable effect Covid -19 on entire world population. It also focuses on how both pandemics destabilizes the normal routine of living and revealing the fragility of life. Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* published 1910 predicts more than century ago that another pandemic likely to happen in the future.

Therefore, extends his further investigation on how these plagues and epidemics amend human behavior and affect them. Here are several occurrences where the narrative shares a lot of similarities with Covid-19. Both viruses have caused in the devastation of the human population with individuals left to struggle for basic survival. The Scarlet plague is truly reflection and forecast to the Covid-19 which would impoverish entire population of the world. Furthermore, the scarlet plague disrupted the routinized life due to which people had to modify their life similarly that coronavirus has compelled people to alter and adjust their lifestyles. Coronavirus discloses the most serious and strange challenge for society and economics, as London narrates similar fear in Scarlet plague. He exclaims with horror that New York and Chicago were in chaos, one third police of New York were dead and commandment had been ceased.

In furtherance, the wide spread of coronavirus gave way to misinformation which turned into distrust of government and political matters. As London in the *Scarlet Plague* portrayed how rumors created psychological trauma and depression in masses who got scared of and feel near to death. As Granser narrates that pandemics lead to misinformation which resulted suspicions and pessimism of being infected and was alienated and left to die. London highlights how pandemics turned the people into barbarians as instead of keeping the real essence of humanity alive became ferocious and hostile. In short, quarantine and other social practices to get safe from these contagious viruses lead to social discrimination and distancing. Kith and kin badly has been badly targeted as no one even agreed to interact each other freely at the cost of their lives. They have stopped going to shared occasions such as marriage ceremonies and even watching live games due to social distance.

In addition to, the journal further scrutinizes that epidemics not only created fears and anxiety in people and modified their behavior but social distance resulted intensive use of technologies and smart mobiles. These destruction of routine activities brought lack of interest in youth for their education, vulgarity badly hits the divine connection, etc. At last, it is also portrayed that quarantine and isolation infect increased the rates of unemployment as closure of various companies brought economic instability due to which people found themselves 'left behind' caused social unrest and increased suicide rates. Granser noticed that these pandemics resulted in uncontrollable apathy as rapid rates of deaths turned the masses as iron amid having no sympathy and no longer felt the pain. So inhumanity paves path to the severe decline and rapid collapse of civilization and culture.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated some of the terrible consequences of modernization in relation to Beck's risk society. It reflects some of the terrible consequences on bio-ecology and techno-science that are often neglected. Pandemics are spreading around the world due to the revolution of innovative technologies and industrialization. It has concluded that Mandel's *Station Eleven* explores the hidden risks in regard to the 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992)', the idea put out by Beck. The book is a post-apocalyptic work that illustrates the hazards of modernity through a fictional account of how Georgia flu affected society and suggests historical parallels to tragic events. The researcher analyzed the text in the light of Ulrich Beck's theory 'Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (1992)' and examined all the six processes i.e. reflexive modernization, individualization, globalization, gender revolution, global risk and underemployment. It is concluded that all the six processes are the consequences and hidden threats of modernity and industrialization which produce undesirable and unexpected risks to bio-ecology and techno-science. The justified study by textual evidences concluded that modernity with all its dark aspects including globalization, individualization, underemployment and gender revolution are challenging hygienic life, bio-ecology, techno-science, social bonding, economic stability and integrated family system respectively. The rapid spread of the virus shows how a single event can have far-reaching and flowing consequences in a reflexive society that is constantly adapting and changing. Mandel portrays the society in her masterpiece that is being suffered from hidden and high consequences of the victory of modernization. As advancements and innovations ease the entire population but their high risks ruling prominently in 21st century. These high modern technologies are challenging life, climate, ecology, content, social bonding, etc.

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