

"THE PLAGUE" BY ALBERT CAMUS AS A NOVEL OF SUFFERING.

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Abstract

Suffering predominates throughout the novel "The Plague" by Albert Camus. In the beginning to the end of the work Suffering comes as a major character which affects each and every characters of the novel. In addition to the physical suffering their dominates psychological suffering too. The country Oran struggles under the spell of plague not only their body but also their soul gets affected by the plague .Camus descriptions make the readers understand about the outrageous suffering. Suffering results in changes in the ordinary life and character of the people it makes the people aware of the different side of life which was not at all known to them till the time of plague.

Keyword: suffering, physical suffering, psychological suffering

Suffering dominates most of the works of Albert Camus. Human suffering which usually becomes unbearable haunts every human being and sometimes this leads people to a hopeless state and make them think of giving up their life. As we are born to the world we are subject to live a life which contains both happiness and suffering. Camus through his novel shows that suffering does not discriminate people, from the people who lives in slums to those in mansions suffering take hold. Camus believes that life is full of absurdity and Camus urges people to revolt against the absurd. In the country of Oran suffering comes with the spread of plague. The suffering due to plague crushes the human both physically and spiritually. The people of Oran are not accustomed to suffering before the arrival of plague in that country. Till that time they were living a comfortable and enjoyable life. The regularity of life in Oran is interrupted with the coming of plague. Different people

of Oran reacts to the situation in different ways. Plague first comes in the form of death of large number of rats then it changes to the death of large number of human beings.

The main form of suffering in the novel is seen in the victims of the bubonic plague . Michael becomes the first human victim of the plague his death makes others to think about the matter seriously. Following the death of Micheal large number of people becomes the victim of plague, suffers from lumps and buboes, high fever, delirium and raging thirst. Death comes as an at most relief to them. But the bureaucratic officials refuses to take immediate actions and they doesn't agree in isolating the diseased ones. Only when the situation becomes worse they decides to insolate Oran and the diseased. In the intense heat of mid-August, Oran reaches its peak of crisis. Many people burn down their houses in the hope of killing plague and escaping from it. The description of the death scene of Jacques the son of Othon makes the readers know about the horrible destruction of the plague.

"In the small face , rigid as a mask of greyish clay, slowly the lips parted and from them rose a long, incessant scream, hardly varying with his respiration, and filling the ward with a fierce, indignant protest, so little childish that it seemed like a collective voice issuing from all the sufferings there. Rieux clenched his jaws, Tarrou looked away. Rambert went and stood beside Castel, whose closed book was lying on his knees. Paneloux gazed down at the small mouth, fouled with the sores of the Plague and pouring out the angry death-cry that has sounded through the ages of mankind."(p:206)

Theses lines shows how harshly Plague affects one and how the site of a diseased affects the others. Tarrou also

becomes a victim of the Plague at the end of the novel. We can see Plague affecting both the rich and poor as the death rates increases the dead bodies are put one over the other in large pits and buried.

Not only the physical suffering but also psychological suffering arises due to the spread of the bubonic Plague. As the result of fast growing Plague the town gates of Oran gets closed and Oran becomes isolated. And the diseased ones are also isolated. A feeling of exile and isolation prevails all over Oran, which is completely new for the people of Oran. All the trade and commerce cut off from Oran, cinemas and restaurants are forced to close and which made the citizens more restless and irritable. All sort of communication and transport except telegraphic messages were stopped. People of Oran got isolated from their loved ones. Due to the fear they made no attempt be in contact with other citizens. The supplies of food and other necessities run low ,they live under the constant fear of the Plague and grieve over the loss of family and friends who have become the victim of Plague.

"In spite of such unusual sights our town folk apparently found it hard to grasp what was happening to them. There were feelings all could share, such as fear and separation , but personal interests, too , continued to occupy the foreground of their thoughts. Nobody as yet had really acknowledged to himself what the disease connoted. Most people were chiefly aware of what ruffled the normal tenor of their lives or affected their interests. They were worried and irritated."(p:73)

They felt some sort of voidness that filled their mind and soul. Certain other characters also goes through the same situation in their life. As Oran becomes isolated Rambert gets trapped in Oran and he is separated from his lover in Paris. He goes through a serious psychological suffering which makes them a rebel and try every means to get out of Oran. Ever since Grand' s wife left him he gets more isolated due to the Plague. Plague thus makes the people dull because they becomes weak both mentally and physically.

Many of the character of the novel goes through psychological suffering due to different reasons. We can see Rieux's mother who is untroubled by the death of an

increasing number of rats. As she is a women who had gone through much serious sufferings in her life , she lived through a war a, the depression and the death of her husband. So for her death of some rats seemed to have no impact on her. Rieux is also separated from his wife who is in the sanatorium in the mountains. He is also very much affected by the Plague and the sufferings caused by the people but he acts as being bold and acts against the plague. Cottard who is an eccentric figure, silent and secretive tries to hang himself in his room and his comment that "secret grief" which led to attempt suicide shows that there is something that is disturbing him. He found suicide as an escape from all those suffering but the attempt becomes unsuccessful and he is again exposed to more sufferings that is Plague. Tarrou also had a past which was full of suffering . As a young man he was unsuccessful in school and also lived a life which is uncomfortable. He left his house because he felt he can't live under the same roof with his father who was a public prosecutor once he demanded death for a young criminal from that day onwards he considered him as a murderer.

People of Oran reacts to the suffering caused by Plague in different ways. The authorities stand indifferent to the suffering they refuses to alarm the citizens and refuses to isolate the citizens until they get more evidence of the disease. The people first believes that Plague will pass way ironically it is the citizens who pass away instead. The Christian authority gives a different interpretation for the suffering of the people. Father Paneloux in his sermon says that Plague is the punishment of God upon humans. He says;

" For plague is the flail of God and the world His threshing-floor, and implacably He will fresh out His harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff. There will be more chaff than wheat, few chosen of the many called. Yet this calamity was not willed by God. Too long this world of ours has connived at evil, too long has it counted on the device mercy, on God's forgiveness."(P:91)

Paneloux believes that Plague is a punishment from God against the evils committed by human, through making them suffer God is trying make them come out of evil. Paneloux believes repentance upon on once sin is needed to overcome this situation. Many religious

people of Oran gets influenced by his speech and believes in it.

Suffering and plague brings about several changes in people. People reacts in odd ways some become hedonistic some become panic and others reacts like insane. They avoid human contact in the fear of Plague. As the suffering rises many lose their belief upon religion and Christianity. The people seem to be wasting away emotionally. By witnessing the death of Jacques the young son of Othon, Paneloux undergoes certain transformation. Rieux questions him how the suffering of the innocent child can be justified he replies it is beyond human understanding. But later he joins with Rieux and Tarrou in the helping process. Cottard also changes after the breakout of Plague. He becomes sociable and tries to make friends as he takes advantage over the crisis to make money by selling cigarettes and inferior liquor. Othon who is the magistrate of Oran who was unkind even to his family also undergoes a drastic transformation after the death of his son. His character softens and before indulging in more kind actives he dies out of plague. Rambert who is a journalist find himself trapped in the city of Oran and at first tries to escape from Oran to reach near his wife. But later he changes his mind and decides to stay in the city and contribute to help fight against the Plague.

The mood of the novel also depicts the level of suffering. The mood of the novel is gloomy and dull. The place of Oran itself lack positivity. It is not an attractive place and is a commercial town. We can see the nature also increases the sufferings of people. The scorching heat of the summer makes things more worse death rate rises more than hundred. We feel that the world acts indifferent to the sufferings of man. The descriptions of each death scenes and the lamentations of the people when their family members are taken to sanatorium due to disease portrays the immense suffering of the people. The excessive suffering even affects the sanity of the people. Cottard's moods gets fluctuated when the epidemic end he loses his mental balance and shoots at random people.

Camus believed in the philosophies of existentialism and humanism he didn't believed that death, suffering etc had any rational meaning. He believed to fight against death and suffering. The same idea is depicted in this novel " The Plague". He shows how Plague brings suffering in the life of people and how different people

reacts to the suffering in different ways. He also shows how to ideally react to suffering. Camus shows that instead of sitting ideally and blaming the situation or giving up life one should act against the sufferings. He perfectly demonstrate that under suffering and death hierarchy has become just a myth. Suffering made the people of Oran think of the futility of life . Before plague the people was preoccupied with the thoughts of money making and pleasure seeking they had no imagination or soul. But after the arrival of plague their regular life got disturbed they got isolated and the extreme suffering and isolation taught them about humanism and love for fellow ones. As they are not exposed to such a situation earlier in their lives they became frightened , hopeless and helpless.

In the earlier stages of epidemic the people of Oran are indifferent to one another's sufferings because they were selfishly concerned of their own pain and suffering. But as the suffering rises the selfishness of people got a decline. Camus believes one cannot win over death but believes in fighting over suffering and death as it provides hope in hopelessness. Here when the suffering goes out of control people of Oran considers it as their common problem and joins to act against it. The helping works are lead by Rieux and Tarrou and several others joins in the action including Rambert, Paneloux etc. They starts working for long hours ignoring their personal lives. To rise Oran out of suffering becomes the motto of their work. Rieux is an ideal man believes in action other than sitting ideal and preaching, he works day and night harder to bring back Oran.

Camus belief of optimism even on the times of hopelessness is clearly shown here. Life is filled with ups and downs , happiness and suffering but it becomes meaningful when we tried to rebel against the negativities. Love acts as a comforter in the time of suffering. Camus believed in the action of man not in any external powers that is why he criticizes Christianity and their way of judging suffering. How to consider suffering differs in different being some faces it with fear, some consider it as a punishment from God , some completely shatters because of suffering and commit suicide but only the ideal ones with proper thinking and understanding of life fight against it and over comes it. At the end of the novel we can see the fight of people against suffering has become fruitful and the gate of

Oran is opened again. But Tarrou becomes imprisoned by Plague and fights against but is fated as a loser . It affects and leads Rieux to grief and sorrow. But the novel ends with the value of human love which makes happiness possible.

The work implies that in life there will be suffering but what matters is finding some meaning in suffering. Suffering makes the people of Oran think and act wisely according to situations. Out of suffering arises the strongest souls , suffering makes us rise for the best. No matter whether we win in our struggle against suffering or not we should fight until we are defeated just like Tarrou.

Who taught you all this, doctor?" The reply came promptly: "Suffering.

-Albert Camus

WORK CITED

- [1] Camus., Albert., The Plague., Penguin Books., New Delhi.,2010