

Poetry: A Therapeutic Tool to Combat Loneliness in Times of Covid Pandemic

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Abstract - Postmodern aftereffects cut the modern man from men and milieu resulting in the vacuum of communication in his life. As a result, the feelings of loneliness pushing him into the quagmire of ill mental health. The Covid pandemic worsens the situation. The form of poetry emerges the best therapeutic healing for his mental transactions. It is also the perfect opportunity to utilize poetry to instill courage and confidence amongst the affected and lonely individuals. By nature, man is a social being. Therefore, social isolation is leading him towards several mental disorders including, fear and anxiety which gives way to depression, psychological stress, and loneliness. The present paper reveals that poetry can be a powerful tool to combat loneliness. Aristotle also recognized the therapeutic power of poetry. According to Aristotle, Poetry cleanses morbid feelings and provides homeopathic healing. Listening, writing, and reading poetry is associated with a reported improvement in pain. Poetry has been changing moods positively and nurture mental health. It provides the modern man a space to vent, reflect, and come to terms with his respective situations. It strengthens connections amongst men. It bestows us sight to see the silver linings in a dark cloud. All in all the voice of poetry breaks the silence of loneliness. William Wordsworth's poetry provides vibrant instances of voice of poetry. Poetry eventually fulfills our psychological need for 'expression'. In the time of oxygen scarcity poetry provides pristine oxygen to the suffocating lungs and turn them with the vibrant spirit of life.

Index Terms - mental health, Covid pandemic, expression, loneliness, Social isolation, healing morbid feelings, homeopathic healing, catharsis.

INTRODUCTION

Man is a social animal gifted with language and literature to communicate his feelings and thoughts. You cannot imagine him living in a society without the language and literature that adds meaning to his existence. His acute psychological need for expression has fulfilled, else he may go mad. Men and milieu,

wherein, he lives to help him pacify his need for the face-to-face communication. Postmodern aftereffects cut him from men and milieu results in the communication vacuum of his life. As a result, the feelings of loneliness pushing him into the quagmire of ill mental health. The Covid pandemic worsens the situation. Literature comes to the rescue and helps him express himself by exploiting its various forms such as play, poetry, fiction, and essay. In this context, I quote William Wordsworth's lines which touch upon the subject of loneliness,

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

In other words, the 'bliss of solitude' can be found by pausing to appreciate what one encounters, alone.

The form of poetry emerges the best for mental transactions. It can combat loneliness and growing mental health problems. It can play a very relevant role and have an impact on mental health. It combats loneliness and also plays crucial roles in helping patients along with the medical fraternity. The Covid-19 pandemic is the perfect opportunity to utilize poetry to instill courage and confidence amongst the affected and lonely souls. Social isolation leads to several mental disorders including, fear and anxiety that gives way to depression, psychological stress, and loneliness. Loneliness increases the risk of premature mortality. It affects the cardiovascular, immune, and nervous systems. It is becoming a public health issue and must be addressed urgently by the medical fraternity.

POETRY: A THERAPEUTIC TOOL

The present paper reveals that poetry can be a powerful tool to combat loneliness. It can provide an age-old way of healing. Long ago, Aristotle recognized the therapeutic power of poetry. Poetry cleanses morbid feelings and provides homoeopathic healing. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as, “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; ... *through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions*”.

The Word “catharsis” has been used by Aristotle in his ‘*Poetics*’. It has been defined as a process of releasing and thereby providing relief from strong or repressed emotions. It is a purgation, purification, cleansing, release, relief, emotional release, freeing, deliverance, exorcism, abreaction, depuration, and lustration. Purgation and purification best describe catharsis. Undoubtedly, Aristotle lays importance on pity and fear, spectators witness the pain of the hero they feel pity for him. In a tragedy, the reader/spectator puts himself in the place of the tragic hero and thinks about what he could do if he were the hero. Every person feels the same as a tragic hero. Feelings and emotions are there in everyone. These are natural that everyone possesses them. What makes difference is their suppression. Some can suppress them easily whereas others cannot. Ultimately feelings of pity and fear arise and the same increase with every hardship faced by the tragic hero.

Listening, writing, and reading poetry is associated with a reported improvement in pain. Poetry helps cope with unexpected or stress-inducing situations. It also increases working memory capacity. It has been changing moods positively and nurture mental health. It also helps lower muscle and mental tension. It fosters writing that also offers individuals an opportunity to reflect on their lives, enabling them to accept their situation. It teaches values such as empathy, develops greater emotional awareness, reduces anxiety and stress, and assesses communication skills.

Poetry provides individuals with a space to vent, reflect, and come to terms with their respective situations. It also provides an organizational structure with which to tackle new perceptions and deal with negative thoughts. Healing can take place within, at a pace determined by individuals. Whether it copes with pain, dealing with stressful situations, or coming to terms with uncertainty, poetry can benefit an

individual’s well-being, confidence, emotional stability, and quality of life. It restores agency, allowing one’s voice to be heard and represented the way he or she wishes it to be. Poetry has immediate benefits for not just the individual but also the immediate family members, and the larger community as a whole.

POETRY AND PUBLIC HEALTH: A CRUCIAL NEXUS

The three aspects of poetry- reading, writing, and sharing become relevant and applicable. To quote Paul Celan, “a poem is like a handshake: it creates bonds between people”. Poetry strengthens connections amongst individuals. It can increase self and interpersonal awareness, and one’s ability to reflect upon significant memories or current-day situations. In this way, it helps combat loneliness. Reading poetry can provide solace while writing poetry, the mind is forced to slow down and to recollect memories, often bringing to life past emotions and experiences. Writing poetry also allows an individual to strengthen his sense of identity and voice. The individual represents himself in words that often cannot be expressed easily otherwise. Poetry creates avenues for self-expression that cannot be felt through other means of communication. It in itself can be a healing and restorative process, a self-guided therapy that allows us to strengthen our mental health and connection to ourselves, and our men and milieu.

Poetry is easily accessible, to read a poem once a week, sharing a poem with a friend, writing a personal blog on the poem, or spending five to ten minutes to write about an idea, a worry or hope, can all be effective for experiencing the benefits of poetry. We must bring such experiences into more communities, where other methods and tactics to combat loneliness may not be as accessible. The opportunity is now to identify the healing power of poetry.

CONCLUSION

Poetry bestows our sight to see the silver linings in a dark cloud. The lonely cloud can enjoy freedom in the open sky. The cloud finds its happiness that was previously blocked. Hence, it can enjoy witnessing dancing daffodils. The voice of poetry breaks the silence of loneliness,

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Poetry eventually fulfils our psychological need for 'expression'. Despite Postmodern aftereffects, including Covid-19, it fills the vacuum of loneliness and pulls us out from the quagmire of ill mental health. Poetry provides breath to the lonely lungs and turns their spirit pure. It is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. This overflow is taking its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility, the quietude, ultimately becoming the source of happiness.

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