



Study of Homebound by Puja Changoiwala as a Pandemic novel with special emphasis on issues of Lockdown and Trauma

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The genre of pandemic literature refers to the fiction and non-fiction works that represent the world at large suffering from a pathogen. It is not a new genre in literature; it has always existed in the world since time immemorial. Every time humanity suffered the attack of a virus, people either documented their experiences and observations or created stories. Pandemic is included in literature as it is an invaluable source through which people can relate and also gain motivation to move through difficult times. Therefore, an attempt is made by first giving an overview of pandemic literature. This study further aspires to explore the genre of pandemic literature through the thematic aspects of the novel under study. The researcher has used a textual approach with a descriptive research methodology. The author under study is Puja Changoiwala. The work under study is the novel "Homebound". The novel is representative of pandemic literature and thus includes concepts similar to those in earlier pandemic fiction, such as trauma, fear and paranoia, religion, exploitation, loss, and death. However, the novel, being a work of contemporary literature, also addresses lockdown, media and technology, remigration of migrant workers, opportunism, humanity, and the environment as themes. . The novel lends itself to a clear understanding when the genre of pandemic literature is applied. It aligns itself with the genre of pandemic literature in terms of themes, incidents, characters, and settings. The researcher has thus, explored the novel through its thematic aspects and has used the descriptive method of analysis.

Keywords: Pandemic Literature, COVID-19, Themes, Media, Psychoanalysis, Remigration, Environment

1.1 About the author

Puja Changoiwala is an award-winning journalist and author of three books, two non-fiction books and a fiction, *'The Front Page Murders: Inside the Serial Killing that Shocked India'* (2016), *'Gangster on the Run: The True Story of a Reformed Criminal'* (2020), and *'Homebound'* (2021). She completed her MA in Journalism from London, University of Westminster. She has worked as a senior crime correspondent with the Hindustan Times, she has covered Mumbai's sins and their casualties in most of her career. Her recently published novel voices the migrants, labourers of Mumbai who struggled during the lockdown and also depicts vivid description of their journey back to their villages to avoid starvation and the virus itself.

As a journalist, she writes about the intersections of gender, crime, social justice, human rights, and technology in India. Puja has also worked as a political journalist and sub-editor with Asian Affairs, which is a London-based human rights magazine. Her writings have been featured across many networks, publications and more, which includes BBC, CNN, The Hindu, the Guardian, National Geographic, Al Jazeera, and Firstpost.com. Puja has received many prestigious awards for her exceptional work, she is a recipient of the International Centre for Journalists' Covid-19 Reporting Award, the Laadli Media Award for Gender Sensitivity, Red Ink Award for Excellence in Indian Journalism and the Iceland Writers Award.

Her first book was published in 2016 *'The Front Page Murders: Inside the Serial Killing that Shocked India'*. The book is about a gruesome murder of a senior citizen in a wealthy Mumbai neighbourhood. Her second book was published in 2020 *'Gangster on the Run: The True Story of a Reformed Criminal'*. This is a sensational book about a hitman who becomes a de-addiction counsellor and throws off his demons, cutting himself of his past and leaving it behind successfully in the murky shadows of the black hand world. Her third book a novel is about the coronavirus pandemic, published in 2021, *'Homebound'*. It captures the lockdown period and narrates a tale about the life of migrant labourers in Mumbai, their struggle, their fears, and their conviction to return back to their 'Home'.

1.2 . Lockdown:

The theme of Lockdown comprises many aspects that are consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. It includes concepts such as restrictions, negligence, chaos, physical, social, and mental isolation, nostalgia, reverse migration, conviction, helplessness, depression, and death. The lockdown also forced people to draw comparisons between the nationwide solitary confinement which led to the migrants' exodus to the pre-independence riots of India.

At the beginning of the novel, after Meher describes the tear-gas bomb attack, she goes on to tell the readers that her father had decided to return to their village and her mother replies, "National lockdown for the coronavirus, Your Majesty. No trains, buses, or cars" (Homebound, p.2). Furthermore, Meher's mother mentions the tight security enforced by the government, "Heavy police deployment everywhere, day and night. Many died on the road already" (Homebound, p.2). This introduces us to the restrictions imposed during lockdown. However, Meher's father still decides, "We'll walk" (Homebound, p.2) home. This shows the readers the firm conviction people had to return to their hometowns even if it meant risking their lives.

People could not adhere for too long to the sudden changes that came with strict restrictions. This was evident when Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation; many of Meher's neighbours gathered in her small house and "social distancing had slipped away." (Homebound, p.3). People in Dharavi, mostly labourers from the economically backward class, "refused television to save on rent, and families that had their electricity connections severed, as they could not pay the landlords this month" (Homebound, p.3). Thus, here we see that the lockdown had made people helpless as they could not work and earn money to afford their basic needs. Further, the uncertainty made them anxious about their future, and they desperately anticipated some news about the pandemic and lockdown, hence they did not care for their safety and neglected the protocols.

We banged and we clanged, and we spared no flat surface – pots, pans, dishes, pressure cookers, rolling boards, buckets, walls and bare palms. We played the drums, and we blew whistles and conch shells. We danced, sang Bollywood’s top patriotic songs, and blasted speakers at maxed-out decibels. (Homebound, p.4)

The narrator mentions the time when the Prime Minister of India first addressed the nation on the 19th of March 2020 and asked everyone to participate in showing gratitude to the frontline workers by ringing a bell or clanging a utensil. The narrator, in a sarcastic tone, informs the reader of the violations of protocols and negligence displayed by the people. The violations of protocols here are neither intentional nor acts of rebellion, but rather an overly enthusiastic expression of gratitude. Therefore, readers understand that the reason for the exaggerated emotions was the unexpected lockdown, which led to indecisive actions by the people.

..., our locked-down shantytown erupted into a carnival, with warm, golden lights and loud, dazzling fireworks. We burnt diyas with as much oil as we could afford, we lit candles until their wicks burnt out, and we flashed phone lights until the batteries died. It was a spectacle, a Diwali before Diwali,.... (Homebound, p.5)

The narrator mentioned how her family lit diyas with the little oil that they could ‘afford’, highlighting the poor financial condition of her family and also the helplessness that they are facing due to the lockdown. However, the narrator added that the city was ‘dazzling’ and it felt like ‘Diwali’, which gave them hope. The action also underlined the reinforcement of unity and solidarity across the nation among people.

Later, when the Prime Minister addressed the nation for the third time, he informed the people that the lockdown had been extended for three more weeks until the 3rd of May. Upon hearing this, people became even more worried, and some neighbours pointed out how difficult it was getting to leave the house. “‘I went to buy rice for my hungry children, and the cops made me do sit-ups’; ‘They let you off easy. I was beaten.’” (Homebound, p.8) The restrictions that were imposed due to the lockdown are evident here, and the helplessness of the people is also visible. When people left their houses to get essential items or groceries, the police would beat them up or make them apologize for stepping out of their houses. People faced financial problems as most of them had not received their salaries or had insufficient savings. “‘Four out of five people in this slum haven’t received their March wages.’” (Homebound, p.14) This informed the readers of the injustice done by people in authority towards the commoners of society. This also shed light on the reason for reverse migration: unemployment.

When the news about special trains being organized for migrant workers came out, Meher’s father was one of many who rushed to book tickets for his family. “In response, thousands of migrant workers, including Baba, gathered outside railway stations in major metropolises across the country.” (Homebound, p.9) Several hours had passed and Meher’s father had not returned home; her family was worried. Subsequently, they learned about a “lathi-charge” outside the railway station. This incident highlights the chaos during the lockdown.

The disappearance of Meher's father, made her feel "It was no light at the end of the tunnel, just a tunnel-shaped life...." (Homebound, p.12) The depressed state of the narrator is clearly seen. Meher's father later returned home with bruises all over his body. He then decided to collect all his savings and flee from Mumbai. In the process he listed out all the possible threats they could face if they stayed back in Mumbai to his wife, "If we stay, we face four threats-we'll soon run out of cash as we have no income, and we'll be thrown to the street when we miss rent. We'll die starving on that street, and if life still remains in us, the virus will devour it." (Homebound, p.15) This speaks for many migrant workers who faced financial problems; they were kicked out of their houses as they could not pay rent, they were starving and relied for food on NGO's and other charities, some contracted the disease and lost their lives.

Jairaj (Proton Uncle) in the novel suggests that they take a freight truck to their village but Meher's father immediately makes him realise that they are short on cash and cannot afford to spend all their saving in transportation "'That's four times our regular train fare and twenty-one grand for the seven of us.' Baba was quick to calculate. 'No, we cannot afford trucks.'" (Homebound, p.19) he says, and so they resolve to walking back home. Further we see few analogies in the novel between the migrant's exodus and the violence happening during the lockdown with India's partition in 1947 and some violent communal riots that happened after the independence of India. "They are saying that the Covid-19 exodus in India could be bigger than the one after our country's violent partition in 1947." (Homebound, p.17) Meher's father mentions this to Bindiya (Electron Aunty) in the novel pointing out that there are many like them who are walking home and have not died on the road, showing his wish and hope to reach home safely. Further in the novel the clash between the Hindu and Muslim communities are compared with the Bhagalpur riots of Bihar in 1989 and the Godhra riots of Gujarat in 2002.

The thunderbolt arrived as we hid behind a bus parked on the road outside Dharavi. My backpack felt heavier, and soon, I realized it was my body, reacting to the bitter, bitter medicine of a new reality, a snide chemical robbing me of my alleged disease, my yesterday. I looked around, scanning my family's face, searching for the gloom of abandoning our home, but it did not show. They were all busy hiding their bodies, oblivious to the lightning bolt, as if it hadn't just torn up the skies. (Homebound, p.29)

Meher and Sameer's family leave at night without letting their neighbours know about it. While they successfully navigate the narrow allies of Dharavi without attracted any attention, Meher's heart becomes heavier with every step she takes away from her home. She feels extremely sad and is trying to see if her family members too are experiencing the same. On realising that it was only she who grieves about it she mentally isolates herself and is not able to convey her feelings to her parents or her brother Happy.

As we moved further towards the highway, I noticed that the canines morphed into men, women and children, asleep on sidewalks and handcarts, under bridges and by open gutters, on hard stone and worn bedding rolls. Their bodies dissolved in the summer heat, and their few belongings lay next to them, tied by fragile threads to their wrists. Soiled cloths and homemade masks covered their faces, more to evade the stench of the ageing garbage around them. (Homebound, p.35)

The narrator comes across some homeless people and here we get to know about the powerless, weak, and incapable people; people who have no place to go to sleeping helplessly on the side of the road. This informs us about the struggles of the homeless people during the lockdown who now could not find any shelter and

depended totally on food provided by others. They are highly vulnerable people who are at risk of getting infected; these are people who are neglected by the society.

.....as we crossed the Sion Fort, my heart lost strength. Baba would take us to the old castle on many Sundays. Seated atop a hillock, the fortress offers a panoramic view of our alpha world city-its hulking concrete, its human ocean, and its triumphalist displays of smoke-belching factories. Dingy and dilapidated, the fort's rooms are in ruins, bushes grow stupidly, and the walls stand battered with graffiti-colourful hearts and love notes etched in stone-..... It's all not wreckage, though. There's also an old canon, a history and our memories. (Homebound, p.36)

We see the narrator often indulging in nostalgia and remembering the happy times she spent with her family in Mumbai. She further reminisces on how she; her brother and her father on a Sunday would spend most of their time in the garden of the Sion Fort, and then she goes on describing the beautiful flora and fauna present in the garden. She then looks at the roads of Mumbai and is scared of how vacant the roads are, and she thinks about how crowded the roads used to be pre-pandemic. "The six-lane motorway, Mumbai's north-south artery, lay empty, as if haunted." (Homebound, p.38) She then sees signs of humans in the concrete jungle, "Their slain footwear lay strewn on the sidewalk, with their empty water bottles and newspapers that had doubled as plates. Footprints of all sizes carpeted the muddy walkway, as the sun rose, illuminating the shoe-shaped epitaphs." (Homebound, p.41) She observes the footprints and acknowledges the presence of other migrant workers who walked these uninhabited roads to reach back to their homes.

When Meher and her family reached the exit of Mumbai, her father and Jairaj (Proton Uncle) decide not to get too close to the border and observe from afar first as there was a crowd ahead of them. Soon they hear an explosion and see all the migrants running back to Mumbai trying to safeguard themselves from getting beaten up by the police. The police had used a tear-gas bomb to stop the mob from crossing the interstate boarder. In a hurry Proton Uncle tells everybody to leave their extra luggage and follow him. He jumps in a "depression" which is a road drainage passage to collect rainwater, however, the passage is filled with filth and extremely unsanitary. "The depression was a road drainage system, created to collect rainwater, and since it was summer, we were safe from the wrath of its overflowing muck. All we had to navigate were dry leaves, human and animal faeces, plastic bags, sanitary pads and the occasional rat carcass. We jumped in." (Homebound, p.42) The tear-gas bomb attack shows the chaos happening during lockdown and the poor condition of the powerless migrants. This tells us about the struggles of the migrants and the drastic measures they were forced to take, to protect themselves, with a disregard for their health, hygiene, and their life.

After their first failed attempt to leave Mumbai and their close encounter with brutal violence, Electron Aunty rebukes saying that the idea of walking back home is 'stupid' and starts arguing. To this Meher's father reveals that the local people too were harassing them, "And, apart from the police beatings, even the locals in Dharavi threatened us. Did you know that? About six of them, when we were returning home after the lathi-charge. They held Jairaj and me by our necks and said, "if any of you filthy outsiders gets infected with the virus, no one will be spared, we will bury you alive." It's time you realize that Mumbai wasn't ours, but the biggest delusion of our lives, the greatest mirage." (Homebound, p.48) People were already physically isolating themselves at their homes this made it difficult to connect with the outside world physically, which

made people depressed and anxious. Moreover, the locals of Mumbai also behaved cruelly to the migrants, this tells us about the social isolation experienced by the migrant labourers.

When Meher and her family finally cross the exit of Mumbai, they meet many more migrant families who are walking back home and they spend the night in an abandoned house. There Meher takes to writing and is worried if any wild animal will attack them. Her vulnerability is seen when she writes, "I keep thinking about the day that passed, and the night that this might become. My mind has developed a mind of its own" (Homebound, p.66) she also adds, "I'm writing to you, ma'am, because writing silences Mind Junior." (Homebound, p.66) Here we come across Meher's disturbed mental condition, and as she could not express her feelings to her parents, she mentally isolated herself and uses writing as a coping mechanism.

'Listen, you need a doctor,' Baba tried to convince him. 'You're weak, you have a fever, and that cough is getting worse every second.' 'Get out of here,' the man howled, still breathless. 'Be on your way, now.' 'But you'll die on this road,' my father persisted. 'I won't,' he answered. 'I will only die at home.' (Homebound, p.82)

The migrant workers were on the road for several days, walking under the scorching sun, some could not find food or water, whereas many contracted the disease and died without their families knowing about it. The people walking back home were aware of these things but all these did not scare them away from going on the perilous journey. Reaching home for them was of paramount importance, and this desire controlled their behaviour. Meher's family comes across a severely sick person, who just like them is on his way to home. Meher's father tries to convince him to get medical help, but the man is so wilful that he screams at Meher's father to leave him alone. The man despite being gravely ill was determined to keep himself alive, so that he could die at home.

Saleha Meher's friend who worked in an NGO in Mumbai narrates a heartbreaking incident to Meher,

"I remember walking into a home where a mother had nothing but water, and she was boiling it with salt to feed her children. We had kids looking for food in garbage heaps, and when a milk van overturned, many scooped up the spilt milk from the road, joined by a pack of dogs. We ensured that all these people had enough to eat. These were migrants too, ones who had risked staying back." (Homebound, p.107)

This shows the condition of the migrant workers who dared to stay back in Mumbai, hoping for the lockdown to end soon. Migrant families who were earning enough for a day were now suffering from extreme poverty and some food provided by a charity or NGO. The effects of the lockdown seen in the novel are terrible. We get to know about Nihal's death, who is Om's (Candy Kaka) friend and was travelling with him.

'The doctors informed them that Nihal's blood-sugar levels had dropped and his body temperature had rocketed. He had also suffered a heat stroke and was so dehydrated that he had cried without tears before passing out. They moved him to the intensive care unit, and then onto the ventilator, but he did not live. His exact cause of death, they said, was severe dehydration.' (Homebound, p.142)

Here, we see the struggles of a migrant. The people walking did not have sufficient water with them and they could not find any help on the vacant highways during the lockdown. The body of the diseased was not allowed to send home due to the lockdown and the risk of spreading the infection, “.....the hospital won't send his corpse home because of the lockdown and the cost. They've built mass graves in an impromptu cemetery near the hospital, where they're tossing bodies of all coronavirus patients. Om said that his friend will end up there.” (Homebound, p.143)

The narrator comments on the extremely poor condition of the migrants, where an empty stomach is a problem that is even bigger than walking home or risking their life to the beatings of the cops. The narrator talks about a man who was “eating from a dead dog”,

His mouth was covered in the roadkill's blood, his red fingers were busy separating bones from the meat, and his eyes, like his stomach, appeared empty. His hunger had diminished him to a carrion thief, and the way he chewed, he made me look at bread as I never had before. Bread was god to him, Ms Farah; bread was gold. Bread was his greatest foe, and bread, the one true friend. Bread was his master and bread, his freedom. Bread was his journey, and bread, the destination. (Homebound, p.164)

The narrator tells us how hunger takes over one's mind and becomes everything to a person. Meher's mother thinks he is a “madman” but Meher's father says, “No, he's just hungry” (Homebound, p.164). We can see the man's powerlessness and vulnerability when Meher's father gives the man some berries that they had picked up from the forest and a bottle of water, “The scavenger did not speak, only a tear rolled down his cheeks, salting his palate.” (Homebound, p.164)

When Press reaches the location where Meher and the other migrants have been held as captives, a journalist asks a kiln worker, Mr. Pali if he has enough money to reach home. Mr. Pali replies, “My wife transferred two thousand rupees after borrowing it from a moneylender in our village, and I managed another four hundred by pleading with households near the kiln. Since I paid two thousand to the truck driver, I only have four hundred left with me now. I do have my legs, though, and they've promised to walk me home.” (Homebound, p.114) Here, we see the conviction of the migrants to reach home. In spite of having lost his two thousand rupees the migrant is hopeful that he might reach home walking.

Therefore, we get to know of the problems one faced during the lockdown. People experienced severe financial issues which led to many re-migrating to their hometowns. The uncertainty and restrictions that were imposed created a lot of chaos and as people could not stay in their houses for too long, they neglected the lockdown protocols. Many isolated themselves mentally, physically, and socially. The lockdown made people nostalgic and helplessness and depression seemed inevitable. Death rates also soared high during the lockdown however, it could not kill the conviction one had to reach their safe haven; their home.

1.3. Trauma:

Pandemic literature cannot avoid the theme of trauma. Both the classic and contemporary Pandemic fiction have emphasised on a person's mental condition. Pandemic stories can easily be analysed through the psychoanalytical lens as it deals with a person's psychology, the trauma that they experience, and their reaction to it with some kind of coping mechanism. The novel *'Homebound'* by Puja Changoiwala highlights the mental condition of its protagonist and narrator, Meher. We can see Meher struggling to come to terms with the fact that she is leaving Mumbai. We then get to know her, and the changing conditions of her mind throughout the novel.

In the beginning Meher describes a terrifying scene in the form of a fairy tale where she and her family are hiding inside a sewer, trying to safeguard themselves from the brutal caning of the cops and their tear-gas bomb attacks. She says,

It was a fairy dressed in white, the tear-gas bomb. She descended upon the earth with a golden explosion and serenaded it with her confetti-little diamond-like droplets that smelt like spices and burnt like the earth's core.

I watched from inside a sewer, as the beneficiaries of her spell, migrant men, women and children like me, rushed to escape her, the darkness she thrust in their eyes and the fire she lit on their skins. Then, still resolute to enchant, she unleashed her little elves-police officers with wooden batons for magic wands and the elves did what elves do. They fettered the migrants' wrists with steel bows and ribbons, packed them up in their iron-walled sleigh, and prepared to deliver them to a lower world. The fairy, meanwhile, disappeared, after whitening the air and darkening the ether. (Homebound, p.1)

Here we see how the narrator calls the tear-gas bomb a fairy dressed in white. A fairy is considered as a divine being who grants all the wishes one has, however the fairy that she is referring to does the very opposite of granting wishes. The tear-gas bomb creates a commotion and all the people think of it as an actual bomb and start running haywire, it does not allow the migrants to cross the interstate border as the air is covered in white fog that causes a pale vision. She then calls the police officers as elves, who are generally considered as Santa's helpers. Elves makes sure that all the wishes of a kid come true, however here we see the police officer whom Meher calls as elves are not fulfilling the migrant workers wish but beating them up without any mercy. This description tells us a lot about Meher's psychology.

The whole novel is written in an epistolary form, and the incidents mentioned in it lets a reader know that writing letters is a coping mechanism for the narrator. Meher in the novel also says, "I'm writing to you, ma'am, because writing silences Mind Junior." In an incident where the narrator and her family are running away from the cops, Meher mentions, "My body, I knew, had gone berserk, and my mind, my mind was singing. A poetic rhythm governed the moments of silence and shrieking inside it: *They're coming for you. Hush. They're coming for Happy. Hush. They're here. They're here. Are they here?*" (Homebound, p.44) We can see Meher's anxiety in the state of distress.

We can see horrifying violence when the cops start beating every man and boy of the migrant worker's group. Seeing this Meher raises her voice and crazily starts screaming at the cops as she could not take the abuse anymore. The cops then start beat her and dragging her savagely by her hair, her agony and disturbed mental condition is seen in her letter as she writes about the incident.

When the cops pinned me to the floor, dragged me by my hair, and tried to silence my insurgent body, I travelled in time. I fled that moment, that fleeting moment of the present that was quickly turning into the past, yet remained unforgiving. I fled the world, which had dropped to its knees in that instant, gushing with barbarity. I fled the pain, the cries of the girl in my head, who screamed as if she were being murdered over and over again. I jumped onto a swing, my time machine, and I oscillated between the past and the future a distant evening, where I lay with my head on Dadoo's lap, asleep, at peace, as he ran his leathery fingers through my hair, and another one in the future, where I lay buried under the ground, asleep, at peace, as moths and beetles feasted on my corpse. Of course, it was abnormal, my reaction to my first encounter with violence, but *it* was abnormal too, the violence. (Homebound, pp. 128-129)

When the cops are beating Meher brutally, she calls it a “fleeting moment” imagining it to already end and become her past. She then tells the reader that she fled “the cries of the girl” in her head “who screamed as if she were being murdered over and over again.” This tells us about Meher's miserable mental condition. She then imagines her happy place, where she is lying with her head on her grandfather's lap, away from all the torture and finally asleep and at peace. This informs us of her desire to run away from all the torment, and live a peaceful life. But later we find out Meher imagining herself dead and buried, she also thinks of her dead body infested by moths and beetles. The suffering she goes through further aggravates her mental state and by this point in the novel we see the dark side of her imagination, where she has completely fallen in depression and cannot find hope even in her imagination.

The grief, however, refused to cooperate, and I wept and coughed, and coughed and wept, until my lips turned blue, my body turned warm, and the cough triumphed, stealing away my consciousness. My parents revived me with a few drops of water, and then, as I sat up, I looked around – at the day, the sun, the life, and all their regularity – and I cried without tears. (Homebound, p.199)

In another scene where Meher has just lost her friend Saleha, she cries uncontrollably. Saleha and her family just like Meher are walking back to their hometown. Meher and Saleha's families meet on the road and the two girls form a bond of friendship immediately. When the families take the railway track route to escape from the police officers, Saleha's family halt for a while but Meher's family continues walking. Saleha and her family sleep on the railway tracks at night assuming that trains were not working, however a freight train kills all of them. When Meher gets the news of their death in the morning, she is stumped but her father tells her to not reveal their identity to the police officer. She holds back her emotions as her father had commanded, which later is seen as her sudden outburst; she is so devastated and traumatised that she sobs without tears and coughed psychotically.

Meher has been so traumatised by the perilous journey that at times she suddenly starts crying painfully, “Tears poured down like torrential rain when that happened, and every part of me thundered in pain.” (Homebound, p.201) Meher who once aspired to become a journalist had now no hope for her future, “There is no room for hope, ma’am. No crack big enough for light.” (Homebound, p.222) Even Happy Meher’s younger brother is seen traumatised when his father has been taken away by the police officers at the Gujarat-Rajasthan interstate border. “His forehead was bleeding, and he sat staring at the border, his eyes silent, the trail of old tears frozen on his muddy checks. ‘They took Baba away,’ he said as his innocence fled him. ‘They took my father away.’” (Homebound, p.209) The difficult journey had put Happy in depression and rendered him speechless, and a once jovial kid was now mortified.

This theme tells us about the agonising journey that many had to take up to reach their homes. We can see the traumas that Meher goes through and her depleting mental condition.

Meher in the end of the novel is disappointed in the world that could not help her and other migrants to reach home, she is utterly annihilated by the terrible journey she had been through. She completely loses hope as she realises that she cannot call Mumbai or Balhaar as her home anymore, and question if she would ever find a place in the world which she can call as her home. The author in the end of the novel informs the readers that, “In the early hours of 27 April 2020, five days after Meher wrote the last of her eleven letters to a journalist, she was still at the quarantine centre when she suffered a coughing spasm, lost consciousness, and never woke up.” (Homebound, p.225) In the end Meher loses her life to the horrible and ruthless homebound journey. This was the reality of many of the migrants who looked for their safe haven while the deadly virus ruled the world. The novel lends itself to a clear understanding of pandemic literature with respect to its major issues of Lockdown and Trauma. It aligns itself with the genre of pandemic literature in terms of themes, incidents, characters, and settings. The researcher has thus, explored the novel through its thematic aspects and has used the descriptive method of analysis.

