

Coping Strategies During COVID-19: Health Humanities Approach

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Abstract

“Knock, knock, knock. Who's there i'th' name of Beelzebub?”— This line occurs in the third scene of the second act of *Macbeth* by Shakespeare (Shakespeare, 1606/2008). This scene, known as the Porter Scene, brings a brief comic relief after the tragic death of King Duncan. Likewise, social media, OTT platforms, television, arts and humanities, and Internet memes bring comic relief to the mentally disturbed people when the fear of death is knocking at the door during COVID-19. On 30th April 2020, a survey report published in *TheTimes of India* states: “It was found that during the lockdown, respondents showed high involvement with social media This prolonged engagement with social media, watching movies, and continuous rest or sleeping can be viewed as an escape or coping mechanism” (Malkarnekar, 2020). Social media, Internet memes have brought people in contact with other people during the contactless pandemic. At the time of maintaining physical distance, people feel a kind of community feeling by sharing memes, and these play the role of a recovery tool during this turmoil situation. Paul Crawford and others mention that medicine is not the only solution for the well-being of human beings; art can also act as a means to connect individuals and alleviate social exclusion (Crawford et al., 2015). These methods, which fall outside medicine, protect human beings from the fear of death and from getting depressed by giving them mental solace even within the COVID-19 pandemic. The present paper will try to figure out various coping strategies during COVID-19 by applying the methodology of Health Humanities. This paper will add a new dimension to the medical field by exploring the curing capability of arts and humanities in treating COVID-19 affected patients.

Keywords: COVID-19, social media, OTT platforms, television, Internet memes, Health Humanities, recovery tool

Introduction

What is Health?

According to The World Health Organization (WHO), “Health” is the amalgamation of some basic principles. These principles are cited in the *Constitution of the WHO*, which was adopted by the International Health Conference held in New York from 19 June to 22 July 1946. The first aspect is: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World, 1946). One thing is clear from this definition that the absence of disease does not indicate good health only; to achieve full health, a person needs to be happy physically, mentally, and socially. A balance among these three types of health — physical, mental, and social — is necessary. The different categorisations of health are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Different Categorisations of Health

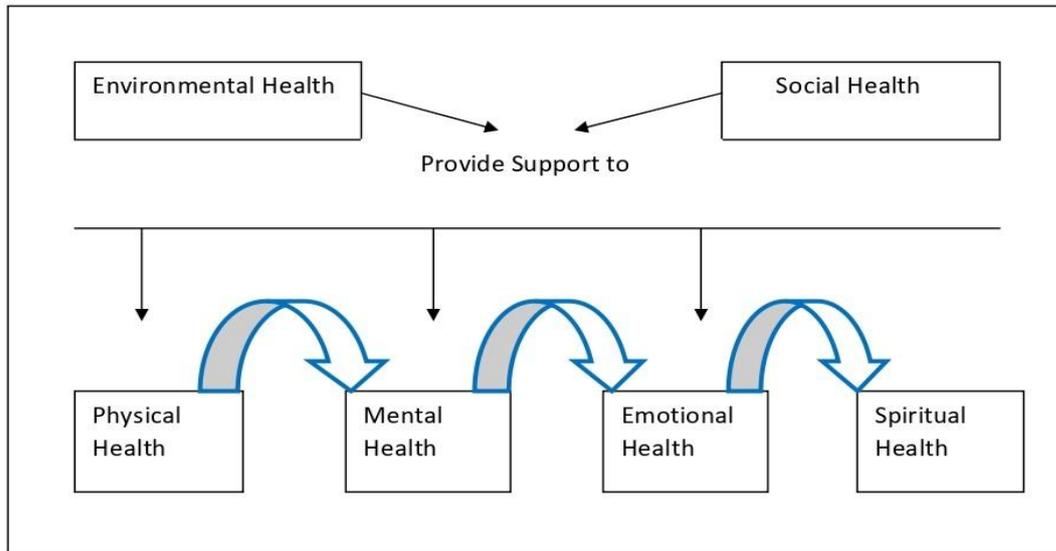
	Types of Health	Definitions
1.	Physical Health	It is the state of one’s physical body and the biological function within it. Proper nutrition and physical activity help the body to survive.
2.	Mental Health	It refers to one person’s psychological well-being. Depression and anxiety disturb mental health.
3.	Emotional Health	It is about a person’s feelings about oneself. The decision of one’s heart and not the head takes priority here. Negative emotions like stress, worthlessness influence one’s ability to cope with their emotional health.
4.	Spiritual Health	The balance among one’s mind, body, and soul keeps one’s spiritual health in check. Factors like ethics, morality, virtue affect this type of health. A calm and peaceful mind is the indicator of good spiritual health.
5.	Social Health	The more one’s interpersonal relationships are strong, the more their social health is in a good state. A person should go beyond one’s limited boundary and develop a social bonding with other people whose companion might keep them happy.
6.	Environmental Health	The environment like trees, air, water can affect a person’s health. A person who lives amidst greenery is happier than staying in an environment surrounded by concrete only.

All of these six types of health are interconnected. The disorder of any can affect the other. A **physically** ill person cannot be happy **mentally**, and when one does not feel good, then **emotional** health might be disrupted. If one’s body and mind are not in balance, then the soul cannot be happy without them, and **spiritual** health remains unachieved. A good **environment** and **social relations** are important here because they can help a person cope with this troubling state (Fig. 1). The presence of these six types of health implicates that medicine cannot cure a person entirely, other catalysts— arts, music, yoga practice, an environment surrounding good plantations and strong

social bonding with other people—which “fall outside medicine”—are also needed in order to improve health (Crawford et al., 2015). The emerging trend of Health Humanities is the proof of this.

Figure 1

Interconnectedness among the Six Types of Health



This area of Health Humanities has evolved as a complementary method to the traditional medical field, which gives emphasis on the application of medicine only to cure an ill person. Medical treatment usually breaks the whole human being into some organic parts. It looks upon a person as a body only, and it usually misses out the emotional aspect that lies behind the body. Health Humanities places the experiences of the patients at its central point. It looks at the patients as a whole structure of body, mind, and soul. It cares for their emotions. The mechanical reading of patient’s physical health via machines, the medical jargon, the irritating sound of medical instruments, the smell of medicines and phenyl, and the corridor containing patients’ waiting family members make the hospital atmosphere gloomy and monotonous.

Health Humanities gives importance not only to the doctors but also to the roles played by nurses, other professionals like hospital caterers, cleaning staffs, ambulance staffs, and patients’ family members. Doctors cannot be present at the bedside of the patients always. At this time, the compassionate feelings of other persons can alleviate the loneliness of the ill person:

Another reason why we have termed our chosen field the health humanities is that the majority of healthcare as it is practised is non-medical. Despite being a popular activity, visits to the doctor, or doctor consultations in the clinic, are relatively fleeting. Other practitioners and professionals and voluntary sector workers may contribute to care. In hospitals and residential settings clients may spend more time with care assistants, catering and cleaning staff, as well as informal and family carers, than they do with the doctors. (Crawford et al., 2015, p. 13)

They can divert the patient’s attention from the disease to the other trivial discussions like the favourite food items, songs, colour and many other things that are not related to the illness. Despite

the patients, this process can also work like a balm in the boredom of those people. This can be a mutual recovery process where every person gets benefitted from the others.

The importance of arts and humanities in the field of medical science has gained popularity amidst the COVID-19 situation once again. Paul Crawford et al. (2015) mention:

The intention is that medicine should reconfigure its boundaries to become interdisciplinary and at the same time become disciplined through the humanities on the premise that ‘arts and humanities approaches can foster significant interpretive enquiry into illness, disability, suffering, and care’. (p. 3)

The insightful approach to literature, arts and culture can strengthen the “skills of observation, analysis, empathy and self-reflection” (p. 18). Many types of “expressive therapies” — music therapy, dance therapy, poetry therapy, drama therapy, art therapy, bibliotherapy, writing therapy — have started to gain importance in the medical domain (p. 11). The key task of this newly emerging field is “to break down the artificial boundaries between the arts and biomedical science to identify mutually beneficial fields of study” (p. 18).

COVID-19 and Its Impact

Human beings are intelligent species. They have access to the sky, land and the sea through their scientific inventions. Even the space is not unknown to them, and they keep exploring that area by sending different kinds of spacecraft. However, Nature cannot be conquered by the scientific inventions and explorations of the human species. It is unconquerable. Human beings feel helpless before the power of Nature, i.e. earthquake, flood, tsunami. When they are busy making new plans about how to triumph over Nature, a new threat has been found on Earth. Human beings are now facing their new life-threatening enemy. Though very small in size, this enemy has the potentiality to destroy even the whole human species. The enemy, CORONAVIRUS, has become successful in putting the entire human beings under very pressure. In order to reduce the spreading of this virus, WHO advises everyone to stay at home. Social distancing can decrease its harmful effect. But to keep people safe, this social distancing poses another big problem in front of the whole world. Pietrabissa et al. (2020) describe how prolonged social isolation creates anxiety and depression among people:

Perceived social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly has had an extraordinary global impact, with significant psychological consequences. Changes in our daily lives, feeling of loneliness, job losses, financial difficulty, and grief over the death of loved ones have the potential to affect the mental health of many. (p. 1)

The government has announced a lockdown to curtail the rapid spread of this virus. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, human beings have to remain locked up within their own houses. Loneliness has started to devour them. Their condition resembles the imprisoned animals in the zoo, where people usually get pleasure by seeing the locked animals. Zoos are like prisons for animals. After this pandemic, this can be hoped that people will understand the condition of those animals a bit and be more sympathetic towards them.

How Can Human Beings Survive?

People cannot live in this estranged situation for a long time. They want to be connected with other people. So how can it be possible to keep in contact with other people and at the same time remain happy in this turmoil situation? They have found some escape mechanisms: social media like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp; arts; music; dance; drawing; reading books; and OTT platforms. All

of these work as surviving tools for them. On 30th April 2020, a survey report published in *The Times of India* states:

It was found that during the lockdown, respondents showed high involvement with social media, watching online movies and shows, and prolonged resting.

This prolonged engagement with social media, watching movies, and continuous rest or sleeping can be viewed as an escape or coping mechanism. (Malkarnekar, 2020)

Observations

Surviving Tools

Though the application of medicines, face mask, sanitiser, lockdown, social distancing can curb the spreading of the life-threatening virus, these formulae cannot bring mental peace and give emotional satisfaction to the people. They need other means that are traditionally not included within the medical treatment.

I. Social Media:

Social media plays a significant role in this COVID-19 pandemic. “Technology advancements and social media create opportunities to keep people safe, informed and connected,” declares WHO in a report on 26th March 2021 (World, 2021). Traditional media like television, radio shares only serious messages. Though people get lots of information regarding COVID-19 from these media, they become scared at the same time. They start to panic, and the entire atmosphere of the house turns out to be very serious and gloomy. However, social media like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram can work as a balm to the already disturbed mind of the people and mitigate the harsh effects of the pandemic. These help them to maintain their relationships and to avail themselves entertainment to decrease boredom:

Before the lockdown, social media usage was on average 150 minutes per day. However, in the first week of lockdown, the figures jumped to 280 minutes per day, showed a survey. The survey added that 75 percent people were spending more time on Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp compared to the week before. In social media, people were largely consuming news and communicating with their friends and families as coronavirus grappled the country. (Coronavirus, 2020)

In addition to sharing information about COVID-19, these media also work like a platform where people share some jokes and memes, musical and dance videos, exercise videos, recipes and other kinds of stuff. Through these, they can forget the pandemic for a while. During the pandemic, social media has been flooded with different types of challenges: 1. #Dalgona coffee, 2. #Handemoji Challenge, 3. #ChallengeAccepted, 4. #Safehands Challenge, 5. #Fitness Challenge and many other challenges (Chowdhury, 2020). Among these, some challenges gain more popularity than others.

Before the lockdown, most of the people do not know how to prepare Dalgona coffee. Suddenly it becomes prevalent, and everyone becomes very busy making their version of this coffee and then uploads it on the Facebook page or Whatsapp status, tags other people, and throws a challenge at them. Dalgona coffee is a beverage made by whipping an equal amount of milk, warm water, and sugar, and when it becomes creamy, the creamy texture has been added to the cold or hot milk (Fig. 2). The trend of sharing the recipes of this coffee becomes viral during the lockdown in South Korea, and the worldwide web has made it a global phenomenon.

Figure 2

The Trend of #Dalgona Coffee Challenge becomes Viral during COVID-19



Another popular trend is #ChallengeAccepted. Though initially it has been started as raising cancer awareness and spreading positivity, it has taken another route during the pandemic. In India, it has been turned into Saree Challenge. Facebook and Instagram page, Whatsapp status are flooded with photos of women draped in saree of their favourite colour, and then they pass this challenge to others by sharing and uploading it and tagging their friends. #Fitness Challenge also becomes popular. Through challenges like “#100SkippingChallenge, #PlankChallenge, #NoEquipmentWorkout,” people are “encouraging others to get healthier by nominating them to try the same task” (Chowdhury, 2020).

Despite these challenge games, social media also encourages people to spend qualitative time by sharing dancing and music videos, images of colourful drawings, cooking hacks, pictures of books.

II. OTT Platforms:

Over the Top or OTT platforms have seen an upsurge during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of subscriptions has increased during the lockdown. In “Consumption of OTT Media Streaming in COVID-19 Lockdown: Insights from PLS Analysis,” Garima Gupta and Komal Singharia has mentioned:

With the 45% estimated growth, India is likely to emerge as the second-biggest OTT market (after US) to reach a value of 138 billion by the end of fiscal 2023. Taking into account the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI, 2019) report that projects 30–35 million OTT subscribers in India by 2021, there seems a high probability that OTT services will soon circumvent the traditional media distribution channels. (p. 36)

Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+Hotstar have gained popularity amidst this turmoil. Cinema halls have been shut down throughout the lockdown in order to curtail the spread of the Coronavirus and keep people safe. As a result of this, people have been hindered from a considerable amount of entertainment. When access to the world has been denied, people have

started to turn their homes into theatres. Films cannot be released through big screens; the consequence is that many movies like *Gulabo Sitabo* (12 June 2020), *Shakuntala Devi* (31 July 2020), have been released through Amazon Prime Video; whereas films like *Dil Bechara* (24 July 2020), *Laxmi* (9 November 2020), *The Big Bull* (8 April 2021) have been released through Disney+Hotstar. These streaming platforms open up a new entertainment avenue for the audience during the pandemic. It can surpass boredom. Many actors and film critics see this trend as ominous for the theatre release of films. Actor Manoj Bajpayee voices his opinion: “Yes, OTT has given the audience a strong alternative entertainment avenue, but a collective viewing will always be fun” (Dubey, 2021). The producer, Ekta Kapoor, shares her opinion, “Television is family viewing, films communal viewing and digital is individual viewing, I don’t see them cannibalising each other” (Singh, 2021). Whether COVID-19 shakes the structure of the film industry by preventing some films from getting released through big screens, this pandemic comes as a boon to the web series like “*Mirzapur 2, Scam 1992, Paatal Lok, Panchayat, Special Ops*” (Singh, 2021).

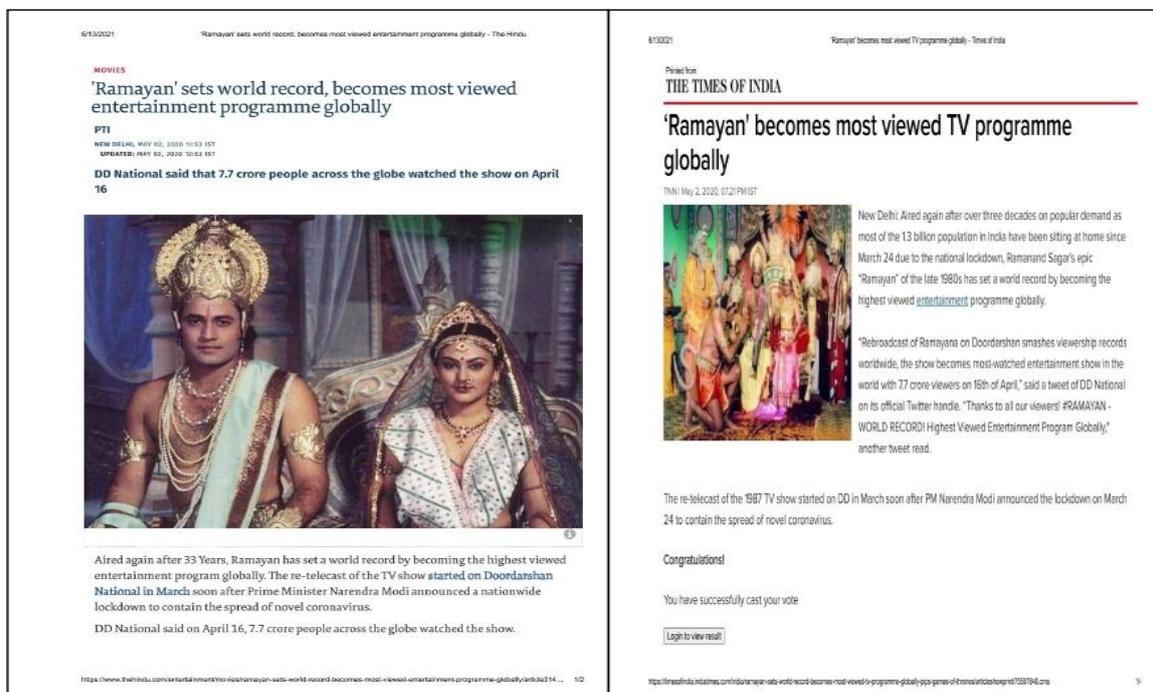
III. Television:

Due to this lockdown, television production also gets hampered. It is not possible to provide the audience with new episodes of the current shows. As a result, the old episodes were streamed through television, but this might create boredom among its viewers. DD National decided to re-broadcast its 1980s classic shows, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, directed by Ramanand Sagar and B. R. Chopra, respectively, and 1990s popular kid show, *Shaktimaan*, soon after the lockdown has been announced in India in the year 2020. Surprisingly, these cult shows become famous once again (Fig. 3). A report on 2nd May 2020, in *The Times of India*, states:

Aired again after over three decades on popular demand as most of the 1.3 billion population in India have been sitting at home since March 24 due to the national lockdown, Ramanand Sagar's epic “*Ramayan*” of the late 1980s has set a world record by becoming the highest viewed entertainment programme globally. (Ramayan, 2020)

Figure 3

During the Lockdown in 2020, DD National Decided to Broadcast its Cult Show, Ramayana Directed by Ramanand Sagar Again



People were engaged with these shows emotionally during the lockdown, and they get mental solace from these. These shows bring the multi-generation — father/mother, children, grandchildren — into close contact. The original audience of these shows goes back to the old memory and feels comfort from watching their familiar shows. Psychologist and psychotherapist Dr Jonathan Pointer points out that the appeal in returning to the familiar TV shows, films, music, books, and even food, lies in the connection between emotion and memory (Verma, 2020). He also argues that emotion and memory are interlinked, and they influence each other. By watching these familiar TV shows, the original viewers feel a nostalgic moment. They feel an emotional attachment by reminiscing on the past events and “re-experience an emotion attached to a particular memory” (Verma, 2020). Their spiritual and emotional health can be healed through these shows. Dr Jonathan says:

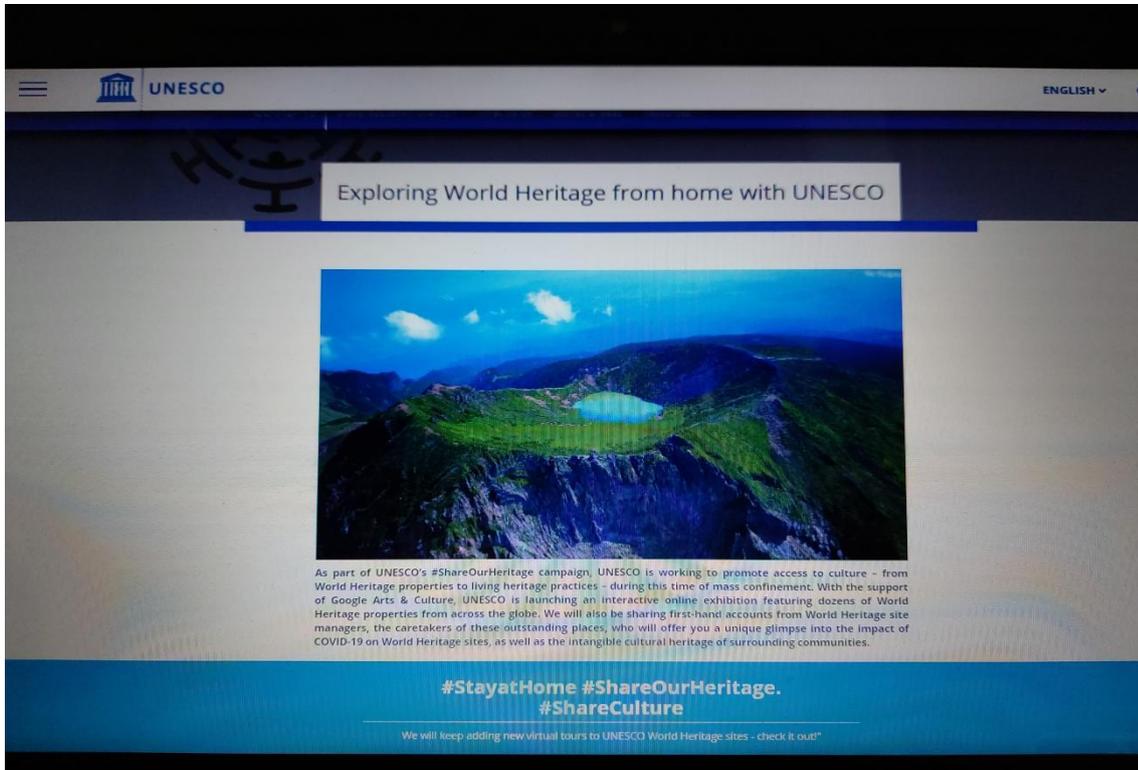
When we are experiencing life as difficult, we can use nostalgic reminiscence to immerse ourselves into our emotional past; this can generate a sense of certainty, safety, and comfort. A simple yet effective way to do this is through enjoying and revisiting entertainment that we have enjoyed in the past, such as music, films, and books. (Verma, 2020, p. 4)

The Role of Arts and Humanities in Reducing Human Suffering

Paul Crawford et al. point out in the book *Health Humanities* (2015) that the role of arts and humanities is very crucial in expanding “the scope of the social negotiations” (p. 6). The magical power of arts and humanities can rescue people from difficult situations by providing mental peace and happiness. They mention that through the arts and humanities, people can gain access to the meanings, narratives of different cultures across the globe (p. 6). COVID-19 has made a profound impact on the cultural industries and cultural heritage. This pandemic hits the artists hard. Keeping this in mind, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has taken a great initiative by launching “a global social media campaign, #ShareOurHeritage to promote access to culture and education around cultural heritage during this time of mass confinement” on 8th April 2020 (UNESCO, 2020). People can take a virtual tour across the world heritage sites through the UNESCO portal (Fig. 4). People can convey their love of art by sharing it broadly through the hashtag campaign #ShareCulture, which has also been launched by UNESCO. People can spend quality time and shed off their boredom with the help of these innovative processes. Within so much negativity, this lockdown can also be “a period of openness to others and to culture, to strengthen the links between artistic creation and society,” proclaims Audrey Azoulay, the Director-General of UNESCO (United Nations, 2020).

Figure 4

UNESCO has Launched a Global Social Media Campaign #ShareOurHeritage to Support World Heritage Sector during COVID-19 Pandemic

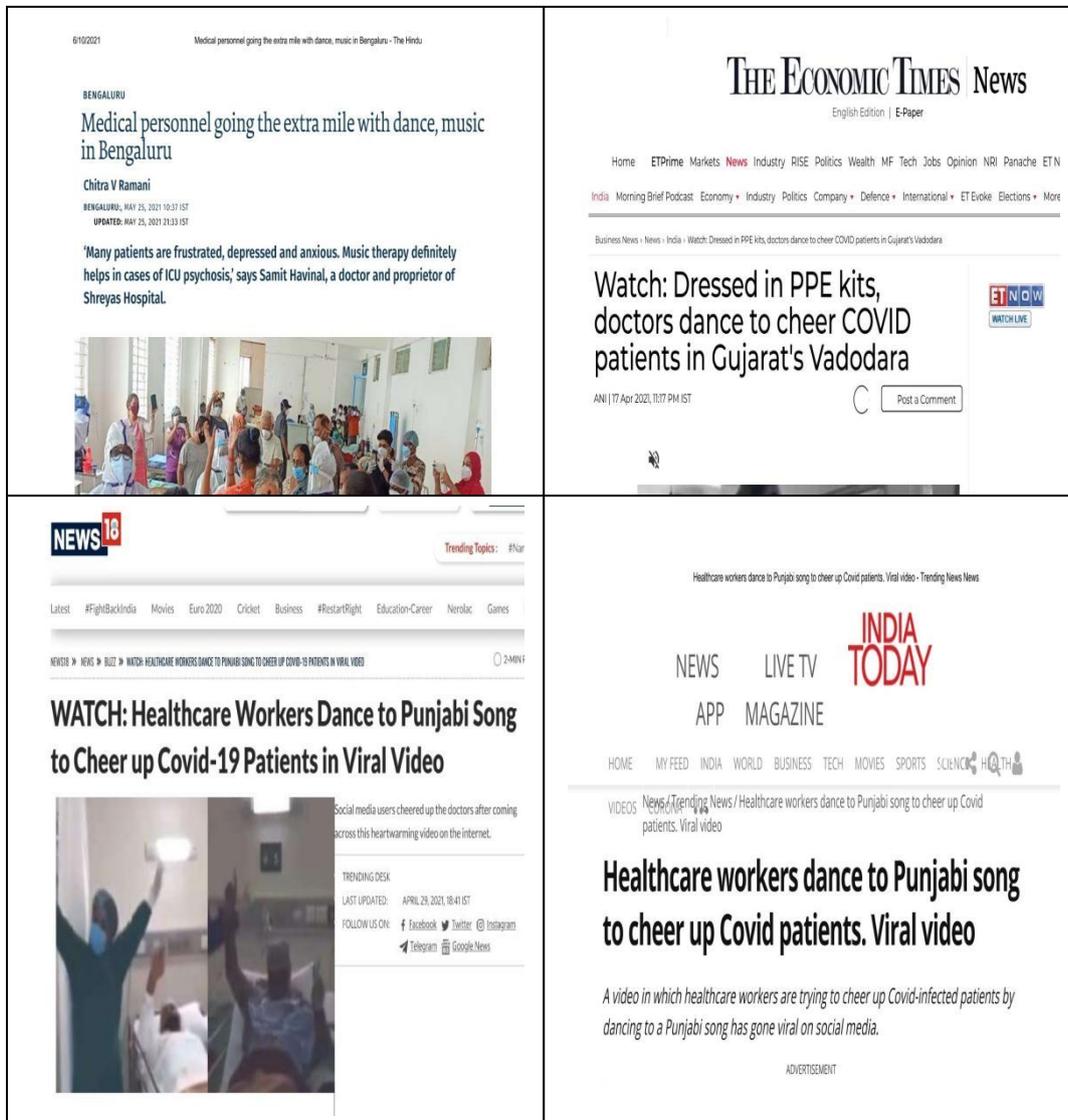


Etymologically the term “Health” comes from the Old English *hal* and Proto-Indo-European *kailo* meaning “whole” (*Health*, n.d.). Despite the application of medicines, other attributes are also necessary for a person to attain good health and achieve complete wholeness. Art has emerged as a healer and also a tool for spreading awareness about the Coronavirus. Vietnamese lyricist Khac Hung’s song “Jealous Coronavirus” spreads awareness by telling people “to wash hands, not touch their faces and avoid large crowds” (Swaminathan, 2020). This song has been conceptualised by the Vietnamese Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health in collaboration with musicians Khac Hung (Sunder, 2020). The lively music of this song successfully draws the attention of the people and spreads awareness at the same time. The importance of dance and music comes into focus during the pandemic once again. People have turned towards these two performing arts specifically to reduce boredom. Doctors and nurses have been seen dancing with lively music within the hospital premises to give pleasure to the COVID patients and encourage them. These actions send positive vibes throughout the negative atmosphere of the hospitals. This is a mutual recovery process because not only the patients but the healthcare workers also get refreshment from their exhausting whole day work by this process. From every corner of India, the news is coming about healthcare workers’ dancing to cheer up the COVID patients (Fig. 5). News channels have broadcasted the rise in the number of Corona cases, number of deaths across the globe most of the time. These create anxiety and panic among the people who are already scared. Some positive news like the number of survived COVID patients and dancing and singing of medical personnel in order to rejuvenate the depressed

patients should also be shared in a large amount through the news media. This will create a positive and healthy atmosphere and generate hope among people that survival from this deadly virus is possible.

Figure 5

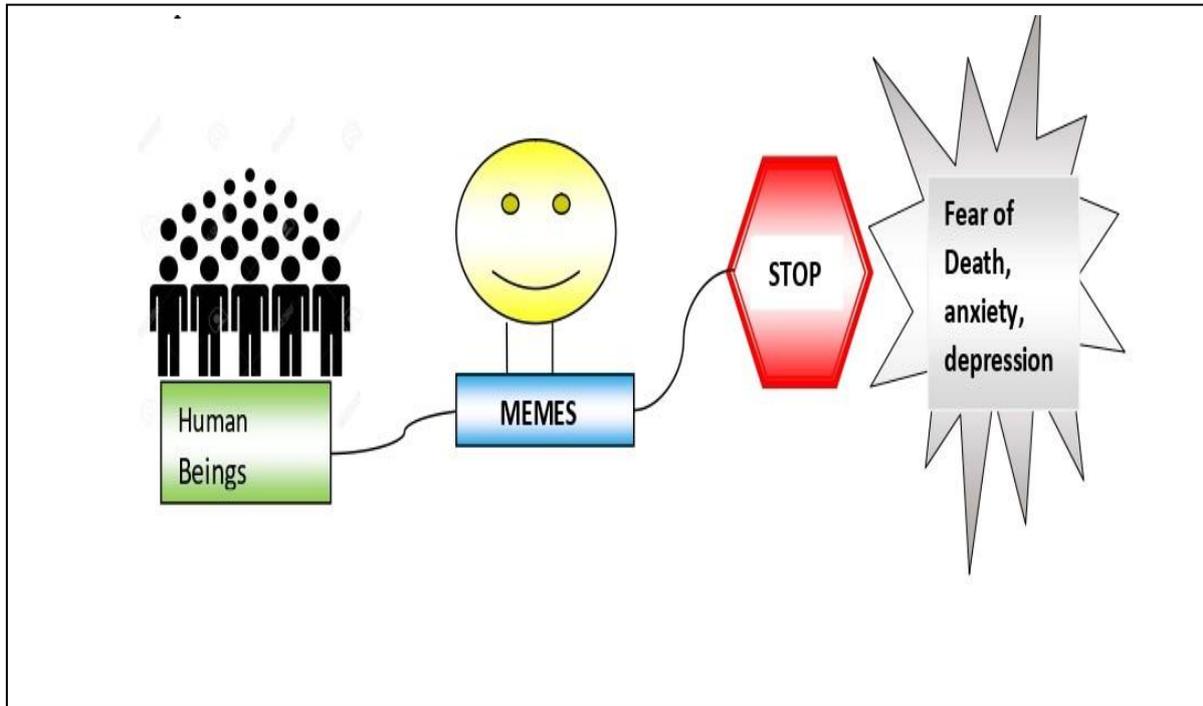
Newspaper Reports on the Dancing of Healthcare Workers to Encourage COVID Patients



Internet Memes

“Knock, knock, knock. Who's there i'th' name of Beelzebub?” – This line occurs in the third scene of the second act of *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (Shakespeare, 1606/2008). This scene, known as the Porter Scene, brings a brief comic relief after the tragic death of King Duncan. Likewise, the Internet memes bring comic relief to the mentally disturbed people when the fear of death is knocking at the door during COVID-19. Social media, internet memes have brought people in contact with other people during the contactless pandemic. At the time of maintaining physical distance, people feel a kind of community feeling by sharing memes, and these play the role of a recovery tool during this pathetic situation. Memes protect human beings from the fear of death and from getting depressed by giving them mental solace even within the COVID-19 pandemic (Fig. 6).

Figure 6
Memes Work Like a Protector



I. Origin of the Term “Meme”:

What is “meme”? According to online *Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries*, meme means “an image, a video, a piece of text, etc., that is passed very quickly from one internet user to another, often with slight changes that make it humorous” (*Meme*, n.d.). Richard Dawkins coined the term “meme” in his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976). He compares cultural transmission to genetic transmission proposing that culture is also prone to evolution like the gene. He gives examples of “language,” “fashion in dress and diet,” “ceremonies and customs,” “art and architecture,” “engineering and technology,” the evolution of which resembles “highly speeded up genetic evolution” (Dawkins, 1976/2016). In order to indicate the idea of cultural transmission, which has been spread by imitation, Dawkins has chosen the word “meme” due to its similarity to the word “gene”. The root of this word can be traced back to the original Greek word *mimeme*, meaning imitation. In support of his choosing this term, he states:

Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. (p. 203)

Although the term “meme” has come into existence in 1976 by Richard Dawkins, it has gone through several alterations and amendments in the following years. In the twenty-first century, which has come into focus is the progeny of Meme – Internet meme. Limor Shifman, in her book *Memes in Digital Culture* (2014), mentions that in the “vernacular discourse of netizens,” the term Internet meme means “the propagation of items such as jokes, rumours, videos, and websites from person to person via the Internet” (p. 2). She gives the example of an Internet meme by referring to the peculiar video — “Gangnam Style” — that breaks the all-time viewing record of YouTube on December 21,

2012 (p. 1). Though the term “meme” comes into existence long before the digital era, the “Internet’s unique features turned memes’ diffusion into a ubiquitous and highly visible routine” (p. 17).

II. Memes as Coping Mechanism during COVID-19:

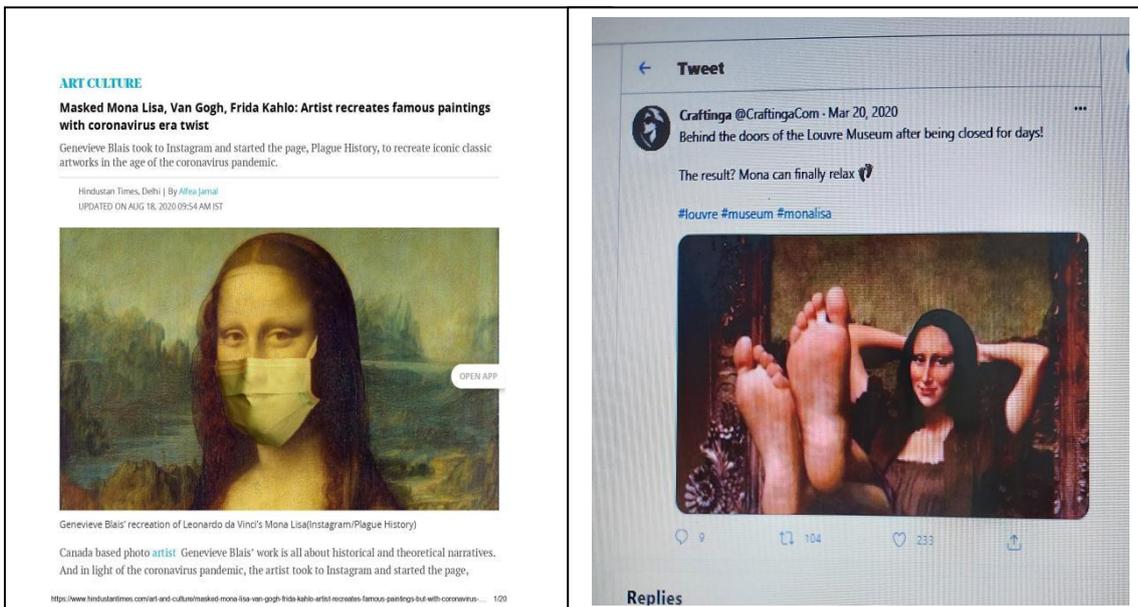
Memes become very popular during COVID-19. People have found a new survival strategy as well as entertaining content. By sharing funny memes through social media like Facebook, Whatsapp, people find some solace. These memes work as a mode of distraction for human beings from the calamity. It is a creative process where one or two images and a caption are needed to convey the message with a pinch of humour. In spite of its severity, COVID-19 has been turned into a funny topic. This impossibility becomes possible through the use of memes. Humour takes priority in these memes rather than the disease. Every person has to remain inside their own house during the lockdown. As a result, s/he feels lonely in the absence of a busy schedule of everyday life. No friends, no family gathering, no party, no travelling — this absence of so many ‘No s’ makes their life intolerable. But in this trying time, memes work like a connection among people. Through sharing and resharing these memes, people feel connected again. Memes work like a community coping strategy. A critical situation can be won over easily when that situation has been fought together. This community feeling helps people to cope with this COVID-19 crisis in a positive way. There is nothing more pleasing than addressing your crisis with humour.

Even the great artwork of Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, cannot escape the notice of memes (Fig. 7). Canadian photo artist Genevieve Blais has started an Instagram page called *Plague History*, where he has recreated some iconic artworks in a new and humorous way in the age of the Coronavirus (Jamal, 2020). On that page, *Mona Lisa* has been seen sitting with covering her face with a face mask. On 25th March 2020, the art and architecture critic Philip Kennicott refers to the effect of memes on the *Mona Lisa* in a report of *The Washington Post*:

As art memes circulating in the age of coronavirus go, it is more whimsical than ominous. It shows the *Mona Lisa*, perhaps the most famous painting in the world, edited to present its subject at ease, reclining with her feet up. (Kennicott, 2020)

Figure 7

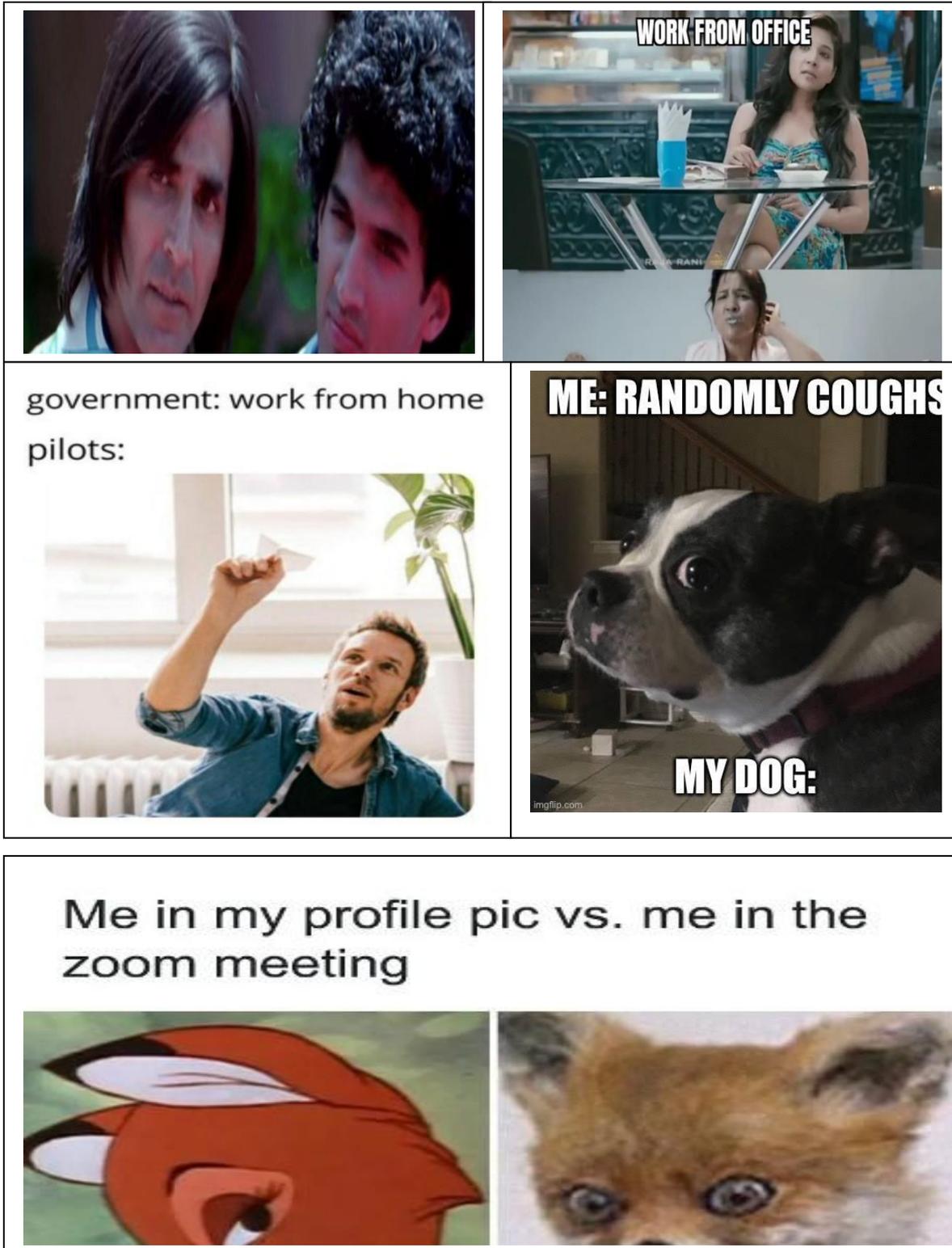
The Effect of Memes on the Iconic Artwork of Leonardo da Vinci, Mona Lisa



Coping Strategies During COVID-19: Health Humanities Approach

A Facebook group called “Zoom Memes for Self Quaranteens” has been created as a space for young people. Here they can share memes with the group members. It has over 500,000 members as of April 2020.

Figure 8
Some Funny Memes During COVID-19

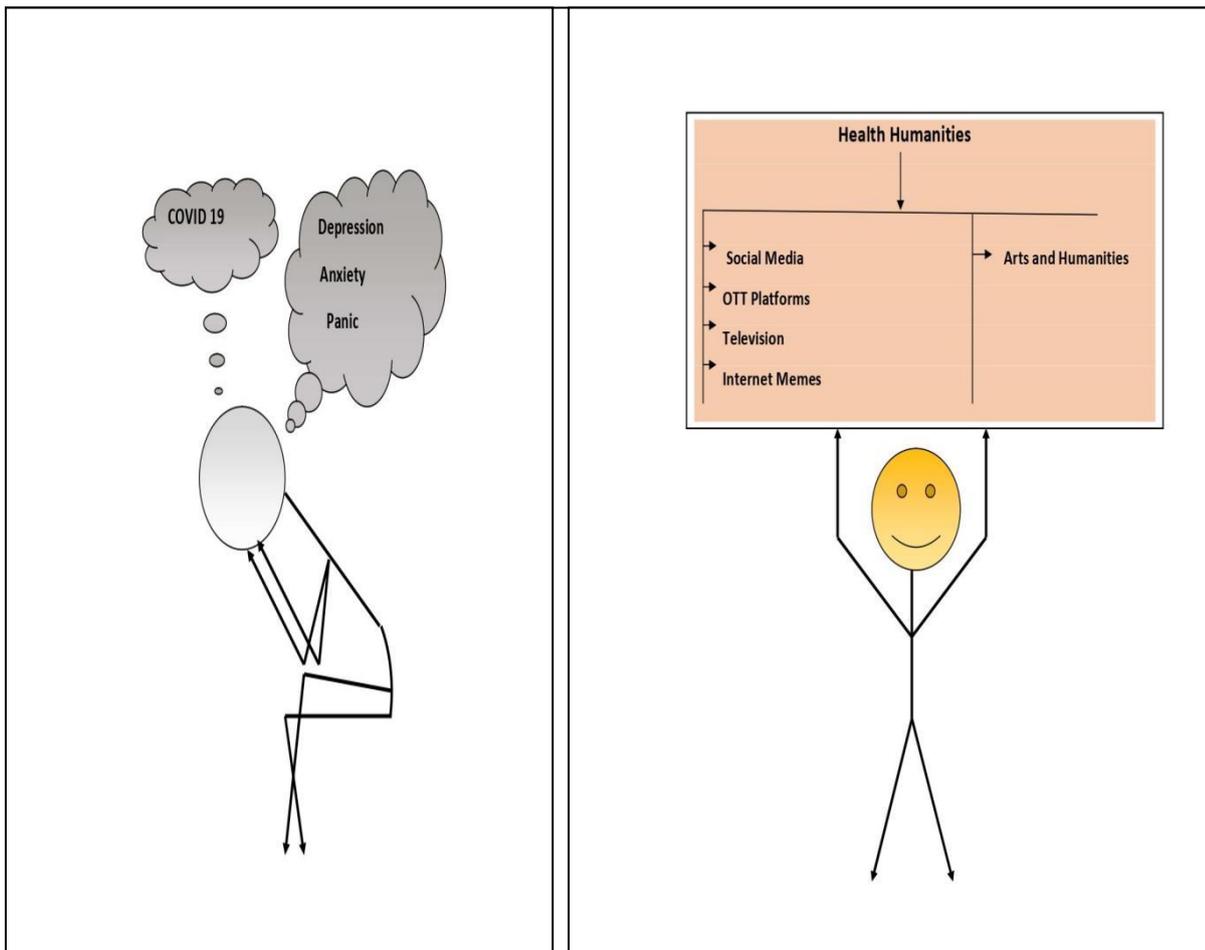


All of these five memes have turned the life-threatening disease COVID-19 into a humorous topic (Fig. 8). Memes can make people smile by the representation of complex reality in a funny way. People feel anxious every time they switch on the news channel during this turbulent situation. The number of deaths knows no bound. Everywhere there is the fear of death. People need to feel relaxed. Memes can give a solution to this problem to some extent.

Conclusion

Figure 9

Social Media, OTT Platforms, Television, Internet Memes Contribute to the Recovery Process of Human Beings



When people feel helpless and isolated during the pandemic, art comes as their saviour. Not only arts but social media, OTT platforms, television, Internet memes also contribute a lot to the recovery journey of human beings (Fig. 9). While exercise and medicines help people get back their physical health, arts is necessary to heal people mentally and emotionally. While on the one hand, through social media, people get connected to other people during the confinement, and their social health gets repaired in this way; spiritual programmes on the television contribute to their spiritual health. During the lockdown, the environment gets the chance to heal itself from the damage caused by human beings before COVID-19. The environmental health of the people will be recovered

through the healing of Nature herself because a Mother cannot watch her children in distress. Every incident has a positive and a negative side. While on the one hand, COVID-19 snatches many lives away, on the other, it gives people a chance to cultivate their creative talent like dancing, singing, drawing, cooking.

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