

RESEARCH ARTICLE

DEPICTION OF SOCIETY AND HUMAN NATURE IN JOSE SARAMAGO'S  
*BLINDNESS*

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**Abstract:**

What is literature? Literature is written material in the form of prose, poetry, drama, biography, autobiography and diary. Literature revolves around human being and society. Literature mirrors the society and its mannerisms. Literature is the exploration of human emotions such as joy, happiness, anger, bravery, jealousy, ego, valor, and pride etc. literature is the foundation of humanity's culture, beliefs and traditions. Literature teaches us how to live. Through literature reader visits different places, understand different culture, religion, language, cuisine, custom and tradition. Literature is the platform to the people who want to express their views, opinions in life, whether it be in politics, education, health etc. while writing literature we have to keep one thing in our mind that, literature has a deep and direct link with human life and its realities. In the creation of good and bad

literature both things (human & society) contributes their sharing. In this present article researcher is trying to explore how human nature affects values and morality of society through mysterious disease of 'White blindness'.

**Keywords:** White Blindness, Quarantine, Morality, Hoodlums, Asylum, Epidemic etc.

**Introduction:**

Jose Saramago, a well-known Portuguese novelist was born on 16 November 1922 into a landless pleasant family in Azinhaga village, Ribatejo District, Portugal. His parents name is Jose de Sousa and Maria de

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Piedade. In 2003 Harold Bloom described Saramago as “the most gifted novelist alive in the world today” (Wikipedia.com). He is the first Portuguese person who won the Noble Prize for literature on 8 December 1998 for novel *Blindness*. He published this world class novel in the year 1995. This novel gives him fame, popularity and identity throughout the world. He became the first Portuguese writer to win Noble Prize for literature after successfully completion of the novel *Blindness*.

The doctor’s wife, the doctor, the girl with the dark glasses, the old man with the black eye patch, the first blind man etc. these are the characters in the novel. The first blind man mysteriously gone blind when he was waiting at a traffic light in his car. He sees everything white. ‘It’s as if I were caught in a mist or had fallen into a milky sea’.(Saramago-5) A car stealer who stole a car of first blind man he goes blind. He said, ‘I am blind, I am blind.’(Saramago-5) Then, the old man, the girl with black eye patch, and the doctor in this way one by one the entire city has gone blind with a mysterious disease of white blindness. Suspected patients are quarantined in the mental asylum. Quarantined areas are under control of military. The doctor’s wife, she is living with blind people but she can see everything. She is the only caretaker of blind people. This novel has crossed all the limits of brotherhood and humanity, (i.e. a man steals car, and in quarantine center

criminals control the supply of food, demanding jewels and valuables at first, demanding sex for food, the soldiers fire upon a group of blind people who are waiting for food.) its all-knowing narrator takes the readers on a horrific journey through interface created by individual human perceptions and the spiritual increase of civilization.

Saramago thinks, We are blind and he sat down and wrote *Blindness* to remind those who might read it that we pervert reason when we humiliate life, that human dignity is insulted everyday by the power of the world, that the universal life has replaced the plural truths, that man stopped respecting himself when he lost the respect due to his fellow creatures.

**COVID-19 and Jose Saramago’s Blindness:**

The entire world has been suffering from COVID-19 pandemic for the last 10 months; we have experienced socio, economic impact, and emotional devastation. Frontline workers are still battling with COVID-19 pandemic. Fiction can sometime imagine with present moment, and this happens true of Portuguese writer Jose Sarmago’s *Blindness* (1995).

The novel opens with a mysterious white blindness disease which has stricken the whole city. A car driver at signal his world suddenly enveloped in a milky

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whiteness. He is taken to an ophthalmologist's where he infects the whole clinic, including the doctor. The group is quarantined in an old asylum by the ministry of health. Doctor's wife she is also at asylum, but she can see well. Day by day the number of infected patients increases. The increasing numbers of patients leads to moral depravity like rape, extortion and murder by fellow ward mates.

The entire city turns blind. They find their city in ruins. The streets become silent, pity and humanness. Even the holy statues in a church their eyes covered in white cloth because the saints did not deserve to see amid the suffering of the blind.

After some painful days, the blindness recedes. The city is buzzing once again. But the doctor's wife who saw the realities inside the asylum wall fears that the suffering will have been in vain. She learns the paradox of this disease. The doctor's wife reflects; "I don't think we did go blind. I think we are blind. Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see. But do not see" (Saramago, 309).

The same scenario of infection seems true about the COVID-19 pandemic which has exposed many injustices and inequalities in the society. In many countries the patients have been suffered due to limited medical facilities and resources. This global pandemic disease has brought issues

such as systemic racism, the state of social safety nets, and variation in health care facilities. We have lost our ability to look away these things.

It is true that one day the blow and unbearable strokes of the COVID-19 will vanish and the dynamic scientists of the globe will come up with the vaccines to eradicate this virus called Covid-19. It is happens then what remains? Although the vaccine comes and Covid-19 vanishes but the painful, unbearable and pathetic memories of Covid-19 and all will remain there. People have been suffering from financial recession and unemployment.

It will be a different topic to explore the consequences of this Covid-19. In short, the entire globe has suffered a lot during this span of Covid-19. Many people have lost their dear ones and unfortunately they could not be a part of their funeral also. Patients, doctors, health workers, police will testify what they have seen and experienced inside the hospital walls, will help those on the outside see in and resist our desire to forget because forgetting this moment is something we cannot afford.

**Human Nature and Society:**

Due to unexpected pandemic of mysterious white blindness the circumstances have suddenly changed in the entire country. Infected patients have been quarantined in an old asylum. Inner and

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outer world of an old asylum reflects the human nature and society in this novel. When the nation is suffering through a pandemic, the ministry has to give orders and keep the situation under control. The pandemic spreads rapidly but the government does not take rapid action. Finally, orders are issued from the ministry and infected people have been kept into an old asylum. It has two separate wings. One wing is for infected people and other is for suspected ones. It has less facilities but it has a boundary wall. It can be described as, “suddenly set up rapidly for the purpose and responsible for the transportation, isolation and supervision of the patients,...we have a mental hospital standing empty until we decide what to do with it” (Saramago, 37).

The place where blind and suspected people are kept that is empty mental hospital but it has no doctors at all. This building has a narrow corridor, dingy latrines, and kitchen zinc, no water supply etc. This building is under control of army, and they behave very rudely with blind patients. During this entire process, government has a supreme power to control the pandemic and make proper arrangements for patients. But, the government seems unsympathetic as far as this entire scenario of blindness is concerned.

The misbehavior of human beings on various occasions and situations is narrated nicely. The car thief's misbehavior is well

known in this novel. Due to his wrong act he comes in contact with blind person and he becomes blind. The boy wants to go to bathroom. This created urgent desire all of them to urinate. While going to bathroom the thief tries to put his hands on the girl's breast. She gets angry and gives a back kick as hard as she could. The heel of the shoes pierces the flesh of the thigh. He suffers from uncontrollable pain and blood comes from his thigh. In another situation the thief tries to escape from an asylum, military comes to know about it and shoots him dead.

While living in the society government must maintain law and order properly but in this novel there is no law and order neither being followed by human beings nor being maintained by the Government itself. The way number of new infected patient increases, law and order collapse and no mutual understanding remains among patients, military and Government. The patients experience shots being fired on the streets. It might be the only way of controlling new patients. All the wards of the building are opened. It means that there is a direct contact of suspected people with those who are blind. The contaminated opens door with their hands. It means, “That would mean the contaminated coming into direct contact with those who are blind” (Saramago, 103). The group of hoodlums disturbs the peace of an asylum and wants to dominate blind patients badly.

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They steal their jewel and valuable things and demand sex in compensation with food etc. The military and Government cannot controlled those people. "If one reads his book *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, it can be called as stinky book, full of human excrements...a metaphor for men's historical degradation;" (Goncalves, Joaquim-17).

The group of hoodlums enters into an asylum. They behave like a blind dictator. The doctor's wife asks them how much money they have paid for the tea or coffee? They said that, they want to collect valuables from each ward like money, jewels, rings, bracelets and watches etc. They also warn that no one should hide anything. The collected valuables are given to the blind hoodlums and then only they are given food packets to eat. The doctor collects valuable things from each ward. He goes to give this to blind hoodlum. He checks the valuables and put them aside according to their value. The Doctor gives only two containers of food based on value and that is insufficient one. The doctor protests and demands for more food containers. From this incident one can learn that, food is the basic need for living ones but the blind or infected patients do not get it easily. They have to struggle to get it and pay for the same. It can be described as, "The scenes were accompanied by indignant protests, furious cries, we demand our food, and we have a right to eat" (Saramago, 130).

Moreover, the taxi driver goes alone and demands one more plate of food. The sergeant sends him back with empty hands. He says whatever is given should be shared. The thief refuses to eat. He is badly injured due to the back kick of the girl with dark glasses. He wants water to drink. He moans regularly because of pain and injury. The blind patients sleep one by one. The thief tries to raise his body. His knee are quite stiff. He supports himself on the metal frames of the bed. He moves towards the door. He drags himself till he reaches the hallway. He goes outside and comes in contact of first step. He is moving towards the main gate of an asylum. The guard hears the sound but, he could not see anybody. His finger is on the trigger of his automatic rifle. The noise becomes louder as if somebody scratches the rough floor with his nails. He looks a white face between the two iron bars. It is the face of the thief. He suddenly shoots bullet towards his face. "Nervously the guard came out of his sentry box, his finger on the trigger of his automatic rifle, and looked towards the main gate" (Saramago, 68). In this incident one can experience that the guard kills blind thief mercilessly and it is the declination of humanity as well as society.

Jose Saramago introduces various characters in this novel. He observes and experiences these characters in the society. He criticizes materialistic character in the

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novel. The character in this novel is the girl with the dark glasses. She suffers from conjunctivitis. It means “an infectious eye disease” (Oxford online dictionary). She is a prostitute. She goes to bed with men for money. She goes for medical shop to buy medicines. After then she goes to the hotel. She waits at lobby till the old man completed his meeting. They both go to the room, “Ten minutes later she was naked, fifteen minutes later she was moaning, eighteen minutes later she was whispering words of love that she no longer needed to feign, after twenty-one minutes she felt that her body was being lacerated with pleasure, after twenty-two minutes she called out” (Saramago, 25) in an asylum there are seven women in that ward. The girl is the most prettiest of all the women in that ward; at that night she gets into bed with an old man with the black eye patch. “Women wanted to fill their memory with sensations experienced voluntarily in order to able to defend themselves from the aggression” (Saramago, 164).

To conclude, human being is a social animal and while living in society one must follow social morals, ethics, conduct and

protocols of the society. As a human being, feelings, emotions should be shared with each other. The principles like brotherhood, equality and patriotism must be followed. The Government has to take a responsibility of each and every citizen of the country in all respect and always should be ready to handle natural and manmade disaster if occurs. The strict law and order should be there in the country and its strict implementation should also be there.

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