

Mental Health and Trauma in Post-Pandemic Contemporary Fiction

Dr. Priya Pandey

Department of English

Government Thakur Ranmat Singh College, Rewa (M.P.)

Abstract: *The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019 and persisted through various waves until its official end in 2023, has left an indelible mark on global society, particularly in the realms of mental health and collective trauma. This research paper explores how contemporary fiction published between 2020 and 2026 reflects and processes these experiences. Through a close analysis of key works such as Sequoia Nagamatsu's *How High We Go in the Dark* (2022), Emily St. John Mandel's *Sea of Tranquility* (2022), Louise Erdrich's *The Sentence* (2021), Olivia Wolfgang-Smith's *Shred Sisters* (2024), and Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library* (2020), the paper examines representations of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), grief, and resilience. Drawing on trauma theory, including concepts from Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, and psychological studies on post-pandemic mental health, it argues that these novels serve as cultural artifacts that both mirror societal distress and offer pathways to healing. The analysis reveals a shift from acute pandemic depictions to broader explorations of lingering isolation, identity fragmentation, and intergenerational trauma. By blending speculative elements with realistic narratives, these works highlight the pandemic's exacerbation of pre-existing vulnerabilities while envisioning hopeful, albeit tentative, recoveries. This study underscores literature's role in fostering empathy and understanding in a post-pandemic world, with implications for mental health advocacy and literary criticism.*

Keywords: Post-pandemic fiction, mental health, trauma, COVID-19, depression, anxiety, PTSD, resilience, grief, isolation, contemporary literature, speculative fiction

