



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

3

## **‘Unpaused’ - Naya Safar - Navigating through Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Dr. Kirti Y. Nakhare**

Associate Professor,

Dept. of English, S.I.W.S. College, Mumbai.

### **Abstract**

Life changed after the first nationwide lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 and the series of lockdowns that were announced later, in India. What ensued, has gone down in history. The COVID-19 virus had steadily gained a steady footing and was a force to reckon with. The middle-aged population in India and specifically Bombay (now Mumbai) had heard narratives of the Bubonic Plague epidemic, which affected people well into the 1950s, from the septuagenarian population, which were woven around plague deaths and had left an indelible mark.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided first-hand experience across the spectrum, of a pandemic. Solitary confinement or lockdowns forced families to huddle together in the narrow confines of their homes, which was a challenge, especially in metro cities, that are plagued with space constraints. This resulted in unwittingly kicking ‘a can of worms’ for many, as a result of coming face-to-face with unacknowledged emotions. Emotions that ranged from grief over loss of employment, the sorrow, due to the inability to connect with loved ones to feelings of helplessness faced while fighting with the demons within, and many such unsavoury feelings, which raised their ugly head. At such times, Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms provided the



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

much-required succour in the form of anthologies that dealt with myriad sentiments that people felt during the pandemic.

This paper intends to analyse the digitised literary representation as captured in Unpaused-Naya Safar- Season 1, which is streaming on Amazon Prime, capturing the highs and lows experienced by individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Lock down, COVID-19, pandemic, human emotions, bleak times

“Literary works are works of art. Storytelling and plot-construction are tools that individuals and societies employ to make sense of illness and health, to build meaningful totalities out of scattered events and phenomena.” (Saxon,2020)

Sensitively curated digitised anthologies of short films fall in the ambit of literature. Streaming of such anthologies on (Over-The-Top) OTT platforms is an experience akin to reading a work of fiction, it is racy, engaging, cathartic and above everything, instrumental in connecting the scattered dots of life. Suffering of all sorts and in all areas of life, during the COVID-19 pandemic was alleviated and redeemed by technology. A shift to the online mode was imperative. From education to marriages everything took place online. Entertainment, definitely, was not to be left behind.

As opined by Saxon (2020), Over-The-Top service providers like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+hotstar and many such platforms, helped put together content that resonated with the people, who were going through tough times during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shows that were streamed were therapeutic and helped the audience to take their minds off the grave situation posed by the pandemic, providing with ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’, many a times. One such anthology of films titled ‘Unpaused’ premiered on 18<sup>th</sup> December,2020 on Amazon Prime Video, a Hindi language anthology film consisting of five short stories directed by a motley of directors and an ensemble cast, revolving around stories of people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, this was followed by Unpaused- Naya Safar - Season1, the second serving that premiered online on 22<sup>nd</sup> January,2022, nearly two years after the first anthology was showcased.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

Season 1 of the anthology of films, will form the crux of discussion in this paper. Bringing together a different set of talented film makers backed by multi-hued and perceptively written scripts penned by Nupur Asthana, Samina Motlekar, Shubham, Ayyapa K M, Ruchir Arun, Abhinandan Sridhar, Shikha Makan, Nagraj Manjule and Sudhir Kulkarni, the insightful collection deals with a gamut of emotions experienced by people, who, with almost two years into a series of nation-wide lock downs, were nearly *settled* in the unsettling pandemic situation.

The first episode of season 1 is titled The Couple, directed by Nupur Asthana. This story features a young, married couple that has adapted to the lockdown. The wife is an engineer and an MBA, the husband too is well educated and well placed. After having worked on and finalised the bio-degradable diaper, Akriti (Akki) deserves a promotion. The happiness is short-lived as the very next day, Akki's illusion breaks, when she is told on an online call about the company being unable to afford her anymore, and the fact that she is laid off due to the pandemic. Hell breaks loose for Akriti, as the job gives her, her identity and contributes to her self-esteem, which she loses, without any notice. There are stages of grief, and it definitely includes, self-beating, denial, playing the victim and assuming that the whole world holds you responsible for what has happened to you. Although, Dippy is an understanding husband, yet Akki's self-respecting spirit doesn't allow her to take the husband's concern in the right spirit. Slowly and steadily her being jobless, makes her feel worthless, she believes in a marriage, where 'equal finances ensure equal respect'. The second wave of the pandemic, cloisters both Dippy and Akriti at home. Akriti, is unable to handle the fact that an efficient and responsible individual like her is laid off, an individual who believes in sharing equal responsibility, be it at home or otherwise. As she overhears a stray mention by her husband about being a single-income household, over the phone to his colleague, in some other context, her ego is hurt further.

Things add up, over a period of time and Akriti strikes a verbal war with Dippy, the drift of which is to prove that she is better, more organised and meticulous as compared to Dippy. A cold war follows the verbal duel, which is dissipated on their wedding anniversary, which is celebrated in a week's time after the duel, at which her understanding partner gets the cake



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

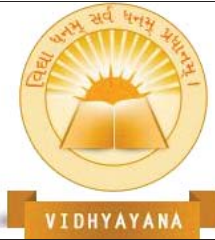
[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

flavour, favoured by Akriti, and at the same time, mails her the updated resume, which she is ready to take on and float in the market.

There are many aspects of this story that the audience can connect with. Independent women, who are capable of micro-managing home and work are the first to be laid off. Statistics indicate, larger number of women were laid off during the pandemic as compared to men (Tappe et al.; 2020 & World Economic Forum; 2021). Akriti is reduced to a number that adds to it. A hard-working, go-getter; Akriti, is nearly oblivious to the fact that in spite of delivering the product, she could be the one to be laid off. The organisation clearly uses her to its advantage and does away with her when it suits them. Akriti's house help assumes that she would be rendered jobless, after she comes to know about Akriti's loss of employment. The house help has her set of issues to tackle, thanks to the pandemic. Interestingly, the same Akriti, who is herself, going through a job-crisis, consoles the house help and assures her that nothing would happen to her job. A positive that comes through, in the story is the genuinely supportive husband portrayed by Dippy, who knows his wife's potential and stands by her like a rock, all through.

The second offering of season 1 is titled War Room, directed by Ayyapa K M. A grim tale, featuring the COVID war room of a certain municipal ward in Mumbai, that is set up to help distressed people find medical assistance online, in the troubled times. Mrs Waghmare, a school teacher is deployed to handle distressed phone calls like many others like her, who are doing the job with inadequate infrastructure and the absence of basic stationery like pens. It is unfortunate that Mrs Waghmare receives a call from the son of Mr Soman Rao Shastri, who is COVID positive and is critical. *Unfortunate*, as he is the principal of the college and is tried in court for abetting the suicide of Mrs Waghmare's dead teenaged son, who had splashed ink on him. The principal, is out on bail; which is a shocking bit of news for Mrs Waghmare, for which she takes her lawyer to task. Mrs Waghmare fights with the demons within, she is full of anger and is hell bent on seeking revenge; which is a natural emotion as she has lost her only son, who could have been saved had the ambulance reached at the right time and with the right emotional support and understanding on part of the college authorities, the incidence could be averted. Mrs Waghmare is a widow, a mother, who has



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

lost her only hope in life. She defers help, tries to dilly dally, shares her personal phone number to seek revenge, but the simpleton that she is, she is pulled up by the authorities, for doing so. She comes under the scanner of the higher ups, for revealing personal information, which they assume, could be done for earning a quick buck by selling hospital beds. However, she emerges unscathed out of the enquiry. On her way back home after being 'tried' for being human, the act of buying a dozen of pens, from a needy child on the subway, is symbolic of possible acceptance of the situation.

The third episode of season 1 is titled Teen Tigada; directed by Ruchir Arun, it deals with the humane side of three unemployed henchmen who are caught in a Catch -22 like situation along with smuggled goods worth lakhs to keep them company, in a desolate place with limited food supplies. The tryst that they have with the police, who slap a fine for not wearing masks, the cravings for samosas by one of them, and the helplessness faced by each one of them in the bid to make a quick buck is symbolically representative of the situation that each one of us is caught in during the pandemic, with no possible means of escape. The twist in the tale is when the overlord at who's behest the job is undertaken dies, as he is affected by the COVID virus. The three men are left with no option but to leave the place without any compensation, which they do, albeit by being friends with each other, for life.

The fourth offering of season 1 is titled Gond Ke Laddu, directed by Shikha Makan, which captures the eagerness of a mother to send 'gond ke laddu' to her daughter who has just delivered a baby. The technologically disadvantaged mother learns to place an order online, for the courier service to ensure the laddus reach her daughter in time. The courier, who is assigned with the parcel, has his home loan at stake, and has to maintain his five-star rating. Unfortunately, he meets with an accident and the laddus get smashed. His wife, who has never experienced the warmth of motherly affection, takes it on her to prepare laddus for the daughter. In spite of several attempts, she is unable to capture the flavour of the laddus prepared by the mother. She ends up calling her and gets hold of the secret ingredient. And lo behold..., the exact same taste is recreated. The couple share the truth of the laddus with the mother, the daughter and the supervisor. Truth triumphs and the well-deserved five-star rating comes through.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

The fifth episode of season 1 titled Vaikunth, directed by Nagraj Manjule, is a subaltern narrative of a homeless father and son duo. The pathos is brought out, when the son finds his father returning alive and emerging out of the ambulance at the cemetery, where the son is employed to burn the corpses, during precarious times. A hard-hitting tale of love, loss and reunion. A point to be underscored in this narrative by Manjule is many were not as fortunate as the son, in getting the parent back, alive also the COVID virus was a leveller of sorts, it did not discriminate between the haves and the have nots.

**In conclusion:** Akin to literary works across ages: Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353), Albert Camus's, Jack London's, *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), *The Plague* (1947), which represented the onslaught of epidemics and the resilience displayed by human kind in the face of adversity, Unpaused-Naya Safar-Season 1 (2022), is a slice of life experienced by people across the gender, class and caste divide. The role played by technology in the form of online meetings or use of cell phones to type messages and delete them when faced by a dilemma is what 'Naya Safar' tries to capture. End of the day, we are flesh and blood beings, with hearts ticking, in the right places. The COVID virus, made us realise *that*, if not anything else.

To round off in Orhan Pamuk's words:

"Eventually I realize that fear elicits two distinct responses in me, and perhaps in all of us. Sometimes it causes me to withdraw into myself, toward solitude and silence. But other times it teaches me to be humble and to practice solidarity." (quoted in Fiorencis,2020)

This truth is condensed in every segment of season 1, driving home the fact, the earlier we accept it, the better it would be for human beings to behave as *humanly* as possible, through display of solidarity and compassion towards one's own self and fellow human beings.



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

**Works cited:**

**Primary Reference:**

Nupur Asthana, Samina Motlekar, Shubham, Ayyapa K M, Ruchir Arun, Abhinandan Sridhar, Shikha Makan, Nagraj Manjule and Sudhir Kulkarni, 22<sup>nd</sup> January,2022  
Unpaused: Naya Safar - Season 1 | Prime Video (amazon.com)

**Secondary References:**

Alessandra Fiorencis 2 August 2020. Pandemic literature: why do we need it, and what can we learn? (medicinanarrativa.eu)

Anneken Tappe, Clare Duffy and Tal Yellin, CNN Business, Updated 9:24 AM EST, Thu December 17, 2020 Women have been hit hardest by pandemic job losses. These 5 charts show why | CNN Business

Jamie Saxon, Office of Communications on May 15, 2020, 11 a.m. Making meaning of the pandemic 'through the lens of literature' (princeton.edu)

World Economic Forum, July 24,2021 How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact women's employment? | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)