

**PANDEMIC AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING:
A STUDY OF SELECTED CHARACTERS IN
HALL'S *BURNTCOAT* AND PICOULT'S *WISH
YOU WERE HERE***

BY

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**Pandemic and Spiritual Awakening: A Study of Selected
Characters in Hall's *Burntcoat* and Picoult's *Wish You Were
Here***

By

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ABSTRACT

Title: Pandemic and Spiritual Awakening: A Study of Selected Characters in Hall's *Burntcoat* and Picoult's *Wish You Were Here*

Pandemic literature is based on the lived experiences of individuals who have survived through it. A lot of work has been done in this field during the last three years during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The current study focuses on the impacts of Covid-19 and how it has affected the mental health of people around the globe. The study has explored the fictional works of Jodi Picoult *Wish You Were Here* (2021), and Sarah Hall *Burntcoat* (2021) to prove that spirituality allows you to explore yourself and the world around. This study has used the theoretical framework of spirituality by Lisa Miller and Forrest Rivers to analyze the texts under study. Miller claims that a spiritually awakened mind is more innovative and creative, and spirituality allows you to explore yourself and the world around (Miller 50). Forrest Rivers states that Covid-19 has made us face our “existential anxieties,” it has cleared the way for many productive and useful thoughts (Forrest 68). My study talks about the lack of focus on spirituality as one of the techniques which can help people come out of the crisis but also suggests taking challenging times as an opportunity. This study explores the thematic shift in literature because of Covid-19 pandemic and thus has adopted the thematic analysis methodology by Braun and Clarke as a technique for analysis. This study finds spirituality as one of the best techniques to deal with uncertain circumstances as it keeps an individual hopeful and optimistic about his/her life and future. The research concludes that spirituality and other therapeutic practices like Art as well as works of literature are a powerful source to inspire and motivate people who have been struggling with depression and anxiety due to the Covid-19 pandemic or life in general. This research also indicates that the social connections between people are of great importance as these help provide mutual support to each other.

Keywords: *Pandemic Literature, Covid-19, Mental Health, Spirituality, Anxiety*

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DEDICATION

To my beloved parents, whose unconditional love, endless prayers, and unwavering support have been the guiding light throughout my life. This work is a humble tribute to your sacrifices, encouragement, and faith in me. Everything I achieve is because of you.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Spirituality is a brave search for the truth about existence, fearlessly peering into the mysterious nature of life” (Elizabeth Lesser 31).

1.1 Background of Research

Literature has become a source of guidance when we talk about shared human experiences in general. It not only helps us during the hard times; but also gives us information about how others have gone through similar times and the ways they used to make it through. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, it left the people in a state of disorientation and shock as they had no model on how to deal with it. In this difficult phase, works of literature have played the role of a guide or a savior. Stories can prepare us for unfamiliar situations as they not only represent past human experiences but also talk about the fears of the future. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the pandemic has changed the way of living forever. It has given people a chance to face their anxieties and fears and come out of it as more strong and spiritual beings. Literature written during and after this time, has become a guide that documents and traces out this development. Spirituality and literature both give us strength to survive the process of change and bounce back as a strong individual. In this sense, both are evocative for providing a pathway for us as individuals to cope with reality and uncertainty.

Human history is filled with the moments of natural disasters and crises. Pandemics are not something new to the history of mankind. Many works of literature have recorded the suffering of people during the times of natural calamity and these moments of crises give birth to renowned works of literature. Wright in his book *God and The Pandemic* (2020) gives examples from the Bible and the life of Jesus which could help people in the time of disaster. Jennifer Haupt’s *Alone Together* (2020) is another book which focuses on grief, love, and comfort during the pandemic, which includes stories that indicate how to stay connected with each other in a time of mandated social isolation. “Literature” can record the core of “life” in an epidemic (Stovall 1).

The Covid-19 pandemic has passed its two-year mark now and there has been a substantial amount of literature produced during and after that time. During the pandemic people were stuck in their homes and there was no other option left but to connect online. People have shared their experiences through digital and social media as that was their first and easily accessible source of sharing. There are blogs, stories and books on social media platforms documenting the struggles of Covid-19. In the researcher paper written during Covid-19 “Reading, Writing, and Living in an era of Pandemic” has documented her observations of the *City of Lights* i.e. Karachi during the spread of the coronavirus. She highlights the social and financial struggles of people during the challenging time of Covid-19. She talks about the confinement of people in their homes, and the only source of connection is through social media. She mentions that her idea of outside world is now limited to her “garden” only and she is grateful for that. Shamsie also talks about the pandemic her mother had witnessed before the partition of India. She indicates through her mother’s experience how people evolve through distress and pain and how survivors are more resilient and stronger with their own struggle and experience. Furthermore, she refers to the stories of literature written during or after the pandemics to put into light the fact that going through challenging times always builds strength, and helps you face the realities of the world, and you emerge as a powerful and well-equipped individual. The study refers literature as a permanent companion and guide throughout the history of natural calamity and crises (Shamsie 1-8).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many contemporary writers have talked about the effects and impact of the pandemic, and the fear and mental health issues it brings along. Literature serves as a historical record, guiding us through crises by offering insights into how past generations navigated similar challenges. During the Covid-19 pandemic, writers worldwide played a significant role in confronting and guiding people through their words and expressions. Both the novels selected for this study - *Wish We Were Here* (2021) by Jodi Picoult and *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall were written during the Covid-19 pandemic and are stories inspired by true incidents during the period of epidemic and the personal experiences of the authors during this time.

1.2 Selected Texts for the Study

Sarah Hall is an English writer, famous for her novels and short stories. She received Man Booker prize for her second novel *The Electric Michelangelo* in 2004. The common themes in her works are existential quest, identity, art, desire and family. *Burntcoat* is a novel written during the Covid-19 pandemic by Sarah Hall and is published on 5 October 2021. It is a story of love, art and desire, set in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. The protagonist of the novel Edith Harkness feels she will not survive this virus called Covid-19. She goes through a lot of phases of love, romance, loss and chaos during the lockdown in her studio named *Burntcoat*. After the death of her partner during the disaster she realizes that there is something which is more important than life and that is what you leave behind for people. Finally, during her last phase, she gets the energy to sculpt a memorial in the remembrance of dead during the time of crisis. She believes that art is not just the representation of your inner self, but it signifies the world around.

Wish You Were Here is a novel by a famous American novelist and short story writer Jodi Picoult. Most of her stories revolve around conflicts within the family and bond shared by family members, family drama is on the most prominent themes in her works. She has written about many serious issues like race relations, school shootings and minority rights. *Wish You Were Here* was published on 25 November 2021, it is based on a true story of a Japanese tourist who gets stuck during her vacation because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The story revolves around Diana, who gets stuck on an island during the lockdown. During her time on the island, she contemplates her life choices, past, and relationships. Her loneliness gives her time to get to know her true self, and she comes out of that as a changed and stronger human being. Picoult points out how events can change and transform us into a different person by showcasing how mental trauma and loneliness leads us toward something that is bigger than life itself.

1.3 Spirituality

Spirituality traditionally refers to the inner dimension of human life concerned with meaning, purpose, and connection to the transcendent or divine. Rooted in Latin spiritus (meaning "breath" or "soul"), it originally evolved within religious frameworks, focusing on one's relationship with God or a higher power. Historically, spirituality was inseparable from organized religion such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or

Buddhism where it involved rituals, scriptures, and moral discipline. Over time, especially in modern and postmodern contexts, spirituality expanded beyond religion to include personal belief systems, existential questioning, and inner awareness (Tacey 22).

Varieties of Spirituality are:

- Religious Spirituality – Grounded in sacred texts, doctrines, and communal worship (e.g., Islamic Sufism, Christian mysticism).
- Secular/Existential Spirituality – Centers on personal meaning, inner peace, or moral values without reference to a deity.
- Nature-based Spirituality – Involves connection with the universe or environment.
- Humanistic/Philosophical Spirituality – Draws on ethics, purpose, and human potential (e.g., existentialism).

My study deals with spirituality as a psychological and existential force reflected in literature, especially during times of crisis like the pandemic. Thus, my concept aligns with existential and psychological spirituality, where the focus is not necessarily religious, but on inner transformation, meaning making, and resilience in the face of suffering.

In the context of this study, spirituality emerges not merely as a theological concept but as a profound human experience that offers comfort, support, and meaning especially in times of crisis such as a global pandemic (Koenig 45). In the context of this study, spirituality refers to the deeply personal, inner experience of seeking meaning, purpose, and connection especially in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It involves a heightened awareness of one's mortality, a re-evaluation of values, and a search for peace or transcendence beyond material existence. In *Wish You Were Here* and *Burntcoat*, spirituality emerges as a transformative force that helps characters confront isolation, loss, and fear, leading to inner growth and self-realization. Similarly, in the Pakistani context, spirituality often takes the form of religious faith and collective resilience, offering comfort and psychological strength during uncertain times. Though in Pakistan, it is often expressed through Islamic faith and rituals, but my study explores spirituality that includes self-reflection, connection to others, acceptance of mortality, and transcendence. It is a response to existential crisis,

particularly triggered by suffering, illness, or isolation. In both Western fiction and Pakistani society, spirituality became a way to make sense of the pandemic and cope with trauma.

1.4 Thesis Statement

Within pandemic literature, spirituality is often discussed as a source of rescue for people facing difficult times. This research is a thematic analysis exploring the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of the selected characters in Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* and Jodi Picoult's *Wish You Were Here*.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of the main characters of Hall's and Picoult's novels?
2. How are the spiritual and existential themes explored in the novels under study?
3. How does the concept of spirituality help the main characters to cope with the mental health issues raised in the selected novels?

1.6 Significance of the Study

As the topic is related to pandemic literature and in the past three years there has been a lot of work in this field, this study explores the thematic shift in literature because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The problem investigated in this research is how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world and has badly affected the ways of living. The study has analyzed the characters of the selected texts under study in this regard. This research is significant in its nature because it suggests spirituality as one of the techniques to deal with the impacts of Covid-19, it talks about the time of crisis and suffering with a different perspective. The study is also significant in Pakistani context as similar to the novels people in Pakistan experienced a confrontation with death and impermanence during COVID-19 pandemic, leading to spiritual questioning. Many Pakistanis turned to religion and spiritual practices during lockdowns; online religious content grew. Lockdowns and isolation affected mental health but also gave people time to reflect on life priorities, much like the characters in the novels. My research is noteworthy as it aligns with the 3rd goal of UN SDGs as it states, "Good Health and Well-being, ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"

(United Nations). My study emphasizes mental health and emotional well-being, which became a global concern during the COVID-19 pandemic. My study suggests taking those hard times as an opportunity to rethink and start all over again with a better understanding of life and more positive energy.

1.7 Delimitation

The study is delimited to the analysis of the novels *Burntcoat* by Sarah Hall and *Wish You Were Here* by Jodi Picoult. It explores the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of the main characters of both the novels and the techniques used by the characters to survive the disaster. Study focuses on the concept of spirituality as a practice to rescue people during difficult times. This research has concentrated on the model of spirituality developed by Rivers Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) and the book *The Awakened Brain* (2021) by Lisa Miller.

1.8 Key Terms of the Study

Important words and phrases that define the main ideas and concepts of the study. These terms are crucial for understanding the study's focus and meanings attached to them.

1.8.1 Pandemic Literature

Pandemic literature is referred to the works of literature written during and after the pandemic. It is based on the lived experiences of individuals who have survived through the pandemic. Stovall while explaining the connection between pandemic and literature declares that "If history illustrates the effect of pandemics on whole communities, then literature gives us a more intimate view" (Stovall 3).

1.8.2 Spirituality

Spirituality is defined as one of the techniques used to deal with the aftermaths of the Covid-19 pandemic. It suggests changing the general perspective about crisis and challenges and to take them as an opportunity to restart your life all over again with a better understanding of the world around you. "Spirituality means knowing that our lives have significance in a context beyond a mundane everyday existence" (Spencer 1-4).

1.8.3 Existential Crisis

Existential crisis is the term used to describe the inner conflicts of an individual. It is the circumstances where a person questions his/her very own existence. It is referred to as a state where one's life feels devoid of purpose and meaning. "Existential crises are high-anxiety times to find the answer to this question: Who am I?" (Andrews 104).

1.8.4 Social Isolation

Social isolation is described as a forced separation; it is the lack of social interactions or having contact with the same few people regularly. "Social isolation is defined by the level and frequency of one's social interactions" (Hwang 1217).

1.8.5 Loneliness

Loneliness refers to the painful feeling of being alone, when one is feeling dead inside and lacks any kind of connection with other people around him/her. "Loneliness refers to subjective feelings," one can be surrounded by people but still feels lonely because the connection and association is missing (Hwang 1217).

1.9 Structure of the Study

The first chapter is a brief introduction of the research topic; it discusses the consequences of Covid-19 pandemic and how spirituality comes out as a savior in tough times. I talk about the theory and selected texts concisely. This chapter also highlights the significance of this research. Furthermore, the introduction chapter includes the research questions that help to point out the problem. Finally, this chapter also addresses the delimitation of this research.

The second chapter is the review of relevant literature. It talks about the previous literature that is related to my topic in detail to make the link. This also helps to point out the gap that my research will fill. This section of my thesis indicates how my research is different from the previous research, and how it is beneficial for the readers and society.

Third chapter is about the research methodology, in this chapter I have explained in detail the research paradigm, the method that I have adopted for my research and my research approach. This chapter explains the theoretical framework of spirituality given by Lisa Miller and Forrest Rivers.

Fourth Chapter is the most important chapter of my thesis as it is the chapter of data analysis. I have quoted the instances from my targeted texts to prove my point. This chapter answers all the research questions using the theoretical lens and texts under study. This section also proves why I think my research is important and how it benefits society.

Fifth and the last chapter of the thesis concludes the work. It communicates all the results and answers all the research questions. I have briefly discussed the whole work in this section. It also includes recommendations for future researchers in this area.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an understanding of how literature has a strong connection with pandemics as literature plays a historical role by providing insights into how people in the past have navigated through similar kinds of situations. It explores how literature addresses distress, depression, and mental health issues stemming from pandemics. This chapter also talks about diverse kinds of techniques used by people in the past to cope with uncertain situations like pandemics. Literature and other forms of art have played a huge role in helping people to survive through crises and deal with mental health issues. Furthermore, this section of my study delves into the role of spirituality as a highly effective tool to deal with the challenges caused by Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter also addresses the gaps I have found during the review of relevant literature and how my study is significant in filling those gaps.

2.1 Literature and Mental Health Issues

Writers around the globe have a very influential impact on their readers not just through their words but also their personal take on contemporary issues. During the pandemic caused by Covid-19 people were clueless about what they should do and what is waiting for them in the near future. Writers, artists, and literary authors were there to console people through their words and expressions. Words reach a massive audience without any hindrance. The impactful writers carry the great burden on their shoulders to say and encourage what is true. Picoult's novel *My Sister Keeper* talks about the positive and negative emotions of the character Anna Fitzgerald. It highlights different emotions humans can experience and their effects on people around them. Various kinds of relations between people are based on different emotions such as sympathy, love, empathy and hate. Emotions play the central part in the lives of humans, or in other words our lives are controlled by the emotions we experience every single moment.

In the essay "The Emotions of Anna Fitzgerald Character as Described in Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*" highlights it is exceedingly difficult to draw a line between different emotions as they are so complex and there are so many factors involved. It is nearly impossible to distinguish where one emotion ends and another

starts. Picoult's story revolves around Anna as she experiences different emotions at the same time. Anna does not want to donate her body part, and she files a case against her own parents for forcing her for emancipation. At the same time, she wants to save her sister's life and there is no other option for her but to donate her kidney. This tension and confusion represent the dilemma of human life where one has to make a choice (Silalahi 1-12).

The paper "Pandemic Fear and Literature: Observations from Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* Cesana" highlights the fact that literature is always a source of guidance during tough times. Literature does not only console us during the time of crisis but also tells us the history of challenging times and how our predecessors had coped with similar tough times. In modern literature post-apocalyptic novels are of significant importance as they reflect on the fear of pandemic and its aftermath. In ancient times people suffered through plagues and considered that a punishment from God for their sins.

In Greek literature there is a great discussion on the relationship between sins and plagues. There is a great discussion on red death and its victims in literature. Similarly, World War I and II had a great impact on literature, great writers have talked about the causes and destruction of world wars. Many soldiers and victims of these disasters have also used literature to convey their feelings. Great writers like T. S. Eliot and Wilfred Owen have talked about the impacts of wars. Literature is not only about the destruction during the time of disaster, but it also talks about human psychology during the crisis, and it leads to post traumatic stress disorder. Literature helps in the understanding of complex issues like pandemics (Riva 3-5).

Literature has always guided people through the stories of the past, it does not only record past events but also suggests how to deal with difficulties as it tells how people in the past survived through similar kinds of situations. Literature gives an opportunity to relate with each other as humans and learn through each other's experiences and try to avoid similar kinds of mistakes. It is also a mirror which reflects our collective image as humans and gives us a chance to examine and fill the gaps. It also gives us an insight into culture, norms, and society.

The research paper "Mental health solutions for domestic violence victims amid COVID-19: a review of the literature" highlights the mental health challenges faced by

domestic violence victims during the Covid-19 pandemic. They claim multidisciplinary interventions as a practical solution to prevent or at least reduce the challenges faced by domestic violence victims. They suggest law making or law enforcement, “home strategies,” educational development, fictional escape plans and technological innovations to deal effectively with the problem of mental health caused by domestic abuse. The paper addresses domestic violence as a global health issue which needs an immediate and lasting solution to prevent its spread (Zhaohui et al. 67).

The study “Supporting family and friends of young people with mental health issues using online technology: A rapid scoping literature review” talks about the importance of family and friends during the tough times of suffering. They claim that people dear to you are your strength and support system while dealing with crisis such as mental health issues, as they are the most reliable people in time of need. The paper highlights the role of online interaction between family and friends during the pandemic and how it has helped people a lot to relate and overcome their personal stress. The study claims that peer support helps to grow out of mental stress and it maximizes the benefits of being able to communicate and interact with others through social media and help them to cope with crisis (Migliorini et al. 935- 957).

The global economic depression, physical distance, and social isolation are all factors that impact mental health during pandemic. One demographic that is thought to be especially vulnerable to stress and anxiety is children and adolescents. According to research, a person's mental and physical health are just as strongly intertwined as they were during COVID-19. Because mental health also affects immunity, mental health plays a significant role in optimizing physical health. As a result, maintaining one's mental health is crucial for everyone (Afifah, et al. 3048)

During the time of crisis people try to adopt different methods to overcome stress and the most important and frequently used method is the use of words and books. As words are the most practical and powerful tool. Picoult argues that during tough times it's not political leaders who bring hope to the masses but the artists through their words, colors and art create a ray of hope for people. Words are a powerful weapon to create a difference in mindsets of people as there is no better way than the use of words to influence people around.

2.1.1 Art as Spiritual Practice

Art is a source of awareness, and it can help people to see the world around differently. It does not only reflect the inside world of an artist but also the impacts of the outside world on a person. Art is also a type of meditation which helps to connect with the divine power, self, and the people around. It is a powerful tool for the relaxation of mind and body, and to convert all the energies into a piece of art. It allows an artist to put out all his\her experiences without using words and being judged. Art is not just an influential tool for an artist but also a source of relief and connection for the people. Many writers like Hall and Picoult have used art as an effective tool to say aloud what is hidden or ignored. In the works of literature, it is evident that art is a savior, and it is a source of guidance in the time of crisis. Therefore, during Covid-19 pandemic art has played a significant role for the people in need.

The book *The Electric Michelangelo* by Sarah Hall is a story of a boy Cy Parks a tattoo artist, who uses his art to express his inner feelings. The story revolves around the theme of vision, the protagonist tries not to see reality, this confusion and ignorance leads to miseries in his life. Eyes are the point of focus throughout the novel. Hall brings into light the importance of the third and inner eye which leads to the divine world. It connects a person with the transcendental world and also symbolizes spiritual awakening. In psychological terms this third eye indicates the feeling of guilt, a person feels as if this divine eye is watching him all the time, he feels guilt and remains under pressure all the time. In her article “Eye Representations in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Sarah Hall’s *The Electric Michelangelo*” Serban talks about eyes as a symbol of authority and judgement as well in this regard. Hall uses eye tattoo to reveal the ideas of her character about the body of a woman. Hall tries to expose the so-called social standards of society by using art. In order to transgress her social and gender role the main character of hall’s novel covers her whole body in tattoos, she wanted to get rid of male gaze and she decides to conceal her body with eye tattoos. At the end Grace clarifies that she does not care what they think about her. All she knows is that they can never see her again (Serban 112-118).

Mental damage is seen as a powerful force in the development of human character and triggering artistic expression. Attar in the paper “Art and Surviving Trauma in Times of Crisis” examines the effects of Covid-19 pandemic and how it helps the main character of Hall’s novel to become a well-known artist. We create more

pain when we simply try to avoid pain. Suffering is a part of human life, and it leads a person to find out the hidden strength inside. Protagonist of the novel *How to Paint a Dead Man* (2009) comes out of the crises as a more mature and powerful person. Throughout the novel art is described as a symbol of power as it speaks for the oppressed and helpless. The Covid-19 pandemic entered the world and tightened its grip around life; it has changed the world forever. At the same time, it also has given the opportunity to artists to use their art and express the change in psychological attitudes and lives after the pandemic. Hall throughout the story tries to convince the readers how the time of crisis leads to create the immortal art which demonstrates the psychological effects of disaster on human behavior so precisely. Hall uses her character not just as an artist who presents her vision of the world through her art but also someone who uses different elements to depict the chaotic world around her. In the paper the scholar defines trauma not just an outcome of crises but something that “generates narrative,” she tries to emphasize the fact that hard times and troubles teach a person to be stronger and mature. Hall portrays the character not only as a woman who could speak for herself and other women around her but as a powerful individual who has the ability to speak for vulnerable people around, to highlight their hardships during the crisis and their struggle for freedom in life (Attar 115-122).

Art has always been used as one of the techniques to cope with hardships and crises. Art helps to relax the mind and turns our pain and grief into something creative and exceptional. It is also a way to convey the inner pure feelings and emotions to the outside world. The article “Art Making as Spiritual Path: The open studio process as a way to practice art therapy” discusses the critical phases in the development of life journey. He explains how emotions and thoughts can influence the development process of life. Allen claims that we need a force which can help us to alter our thought process and can amend our broken personalities and relationships. He suggests art therapy as a method to improve the quality of life. Furthermore, Allen argues that art therapy is a spiritual practice which can help people to understand and adapt their emotions and surroundings (Allen 271- 285).

The research article “Art as a spiritual practice: The interplay between artistic creation and spiritual search in seven Colombian artists” puts into light the relationship between art and spirituality. The researcher considers art as a tool which helps to access or explore spiritual insights. According to Rincon, the meaning making process through

art is a spiritual practice to understand the meaning and real purpose of life. He takes into account the artistic exploration of different artistic and how that turns into the journey of spiritual exploration (Rincon 132- 146).

2.1.2 Spirituality and Mental Health

In the paper “The Relationship Between Spirituality, Health-Related Behavior, and Psychological Well-Being” discusses the relationship between spirituality and psychological health, he defines subjective well-being in psychological terms. He argues that spirituality is a naturally growing and personalized phenomenon. It is the connection between a person and the higher purpose or power. Spirituality is seeking the meaning and purpose of life; it enables a person to search for truth. Authors define spirituality as a power to discover the world around, and the purpose of existence. Spirituality builds the connection with the higher power, him/herself and the people around. It answers all the questions related to existence and connects a person with the transcendental world. Religion is defined as a social phenomenon which deals with rituals and daily practices whereas spirituality is something personal which deals with a person on an individual level, it is related with a person’s inside and outside world. For spirituality transcendence is the most important thing as it guides you to know yourself, to set a goal for yourself and achieve that goal with enthusiasm. Spirituality does not only guide towards the right path but also gives a person that required mental and physical strength. It is important for mental well-being; it helps to recover from mental illness. Spirituality plays an important role in the psychological well-being of a person as it reduces the chances of mental breakdowns and provides the high aims in life which ultimately guides you to a higher level of satisfaction (Bozek et al. 5-13).

The research paper “Spirituality, Religiosity and the Mental Health Consequences of Social Isolation During Covid-19 Pandemic” argues that religiosity and spirituality are highly practiced during the Covid-19 pandemic as this was the only source of relief for the people filled with fear and anxiety. It helped people to worry less in the time of crisis and to be hopeful that this chaos will end soon and we will get back to our normal lives. The spiritual growth during the time of pandemic is unbelievable, it connected people with each other during the time of social isolation, and it was the only relief during this critical time. During the time of pandemic problems like unemployment, mental health issues and lack of medical facilities there, people were asked to stay at home. In this state people were exposed to negativity and

hopelessness, there was nothing to keep them intact with positivity but religiosity and spirituality. Devotion and belief in higher power helps to rescue vulnerable people not just in the short term but also give them hope for the long term. The inner peace and strength that spirituality gives a person helps him\her to fight the inner demons and to deal with reality. The study examines how during the time of social isolation when there was negativity all around, spiritual beliefs helped people to stay calm and turn their sadness into positive high energies. It does not help only to overcome the traumatic situation but also gives courage to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (Lucchetti et al. 672-679).

The study “Research on Religion, Spirituality and Mental Health: A Review” has discussed the importance of religion in helping people to overcome depression and mental health issues. The study identifies religion as a powerful source to cope with stress and anxiety. Paper uncovers the relationship between religion, mental health, and spirituality. Religion is represented as a means of hope and comfort, whereas spirituality is represented as a powerful force which makes people accept reality and the truth. Finally, the researchers have concluded the paper with a question that it is still difficult to determine whether these are the sources of comfort or a liability for us to progress in life (Koenig 283- 291).

The article “Spirituality and Mental Health” claims that religion has always played a crucial part in providing mental health care as it is a source of comfort and hope. The study defines religion and spirituality as a powerful tool of guidance in the time of emotional distress and suffering. The research paper provides the insight of how mental health and religion are related to each other (Kao et al. 42- 54).

All facets of people's lives are impacted by the new coronavirus disease Covid-19, but mental health is especially affected because of the pandemic's accompanying fear. Therefore, the goal of this study was to determine how fear, spirituality, and mental health relate to Covid-19 in the adults of Malaysia. This study also looks at spirituality as a mediator in the connection between mental health and terror. Approximately 280 adults from Malaysia participated in the study. This study is quantitative in nature. Data analysis has been done using the SEM-PLS approach. Intriguingly, the data showed that those with a high level of spirituality would have lower levels of mental health issues, while those with a high level of fear would have higher levels of mental health issues. The results showed that the association between

fear and mental health was mediated by spirituality. This study will contribute to the understanding of the significance of spiritual values in promoting better mental health among Malaysian people (Rathakrishnan et al. 815332)

2.2 Emotional and Psychological Impacts of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that is different in nature from previous disasters as the chaos and desperation of medical science made it unbearable for the people because they were clue less about the whole situation, they had no idea how to control the disease. This virus was something new for medical science as well, and there was no proper medication for the cure. Fear and anxiety during the time of pandemic is something natural. The fear of losing family and friends, and the anxiety of lockdowns and quarantine during Covid-19 has left people with some irrevocable psychological effects. During these challenging times religion and spiritual beliefs are the only ray of hope to rescue people, to give them the strength they need the most. Every religion, despite all the differences, teaches to be positive and hopeful during the time of crises.

There is an unbreakable relation between religion and health and many medical specialists have an optimistic approach towards spirituality. Recovery from any disease depends on will power, a mentally strong person bounces back to life with more strength and enthusiasm. Spirituality provides a person with willpower and mental strength it requires to get back on track. Religious practices demonstrate the right ways; they guide you to be a disciplined person and do everything properly on time. It is the light which leads to the right path. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said “cleanliness is half of the faith” and it is a compulsion for Muslims to do ablution five times a day before every prayer. This exactly includes all the precautions during Covid-19, it also shows how religious practices are a complete guideline to a healthy and happy life. Similarly, in Buddhist religion they practice a regular mindful meditation to overcome the fear of death, same kind of practice is needed during the time of Covid-19 pandemic. In the essay “Covid-19 Epidemic and Spirituality: A Review of the Benefits of Religion in Times of Crisis” discusses how Covid-19 was a sudden shock for the globe with thousands of killings, prayers and spiritual believes were the only ways of relieving the uncertainty (Fardin 2-4).

Chaos and uncertainty during the time of Covid-19 pandemic has led people towards more complicated issues like mental, emotional, and psychological stress, as it is easy to get stressed when you are unaware of the consequences of the problem you are facing. Covid-19 has made people think that they are worthless and are unable to do anything to get out of the situation. Isolation and social distancing had made the situation even worse. People had no clue about this infrequent situation, as they had no prior knowledge about that.

In the research paper “Changes in family chaos and family relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from a longitudinal study” highlights the chaos in family relationships during the time of Covid-19. The research paper claims that the forced shutdowns during the Pandemic have caused a lot of damage to family relationships as it has changed the process of parenting and has resulted into so many conflicts between parents, children, and siblings. It has also increased the ratio of family stress. Furthermore, the paper declares the Covid-19 pandemic the worst time of contemporary age which has brought chaos, confusion, and conflicts in every relationship (Jenna R et al. 1597).

Scholars in their paper “Chaos theory applied to the outbreak of COVID-19: an ancillary approach to decision making in pandemic context” has discussed the approach of decision making in different countries in the context of Pandemic. There was no information available in the beginning, there was nothing but speculation and chaos. Finally, the world took the model of China, Japan and Italy as these countries were affected by the virus very rapidly and badly. That model helped to predict situations and enabled authorities to take rapid actions on time (Mangiarotti et al. 92-98).

2.2.1 Pandemic and Spirituality

In this fast-moving world there are a lot of people who are struggling with mental health. Especially in critical times like Covid-19 pandemic where people are facing unusual circumstances like social distancing and isolation, in these conditions stress, anxiety and fear results in mental issues. Spiritual activities are of great importance in these kinds of unpredictable situations. One of the ways that has helped people to deal with these threatening times of pandemic is the idea of spirituality becoming a source of solace and comfort.

The paper “Spirituality to Cope with COVID-19 Pandemic, Climate Change and Future Global Challenges” stresses upon the matter to train the stakeholders of health care and health professionals to connect people with religion and spiritual activities. It will help to cope with the consequences of pandemic and will also push people toward positivity. Because of lockdowns and social isolation, the world has faced many economic and social difficulties (Chirico 154). Spirituality played a crucial role in coping with all the complications during pandemic, it rescued people in the time of crisis. Chirico defines spirituality as the “intellectual connectedness” (Chirico 156) with him/herself and the world around. It also includes the meaning and purpose of life, the true meaning of love and happiness. Critics also believe that religion and spirituality are interconnected, and it is a difficult task to separate them, but this is also true that one can be spiritual without being religious and vice versa. In literature both spirituality and religion are personal practices and can be used in times of crisis. Difficult times always give an opportunity to find new and different ways of living and enhance the skills to cope with disasters (Chirico 151-158).

All the research studies in the literature review talk about Pandemic as a period of fear and anxiety. They talk about chaos in the times of crises, as people are clue less, they have no prior knowledge of it as it is something new for them. They seek help through faith, literature, and art. They claim that literature has the power to influence people and make them realize that they are not alone in this fight. Similarly, faith as a spiritual practice gives us the will power to fight with the disease and mental health issues we are facing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, art is defined as the source of awareness, and it can help people to see the world around differently. It does not only reflect the inside world of an artist but also shows the impact of the outside world on a person. Art is also a type of meditation which helps to connect with the divine power, self, and the people around.

The gap that my study addresses is the lack of focus on spirituality as one of the techniques which cannot only help people to come out of the crisis but also suggests taking challenging times as an opportunity to take a break and rethink about life, to learn and be the better version of yourself. This research suggests that to change the general perspective towards crisis or tough times, as the study purposes that crisis is not just a testing time but an opportunity to gain experience and change for the better. It is also the time to think beyond ourselves, and break that shell which binds us and embrace

the truth. This study talks about suffering as a journey of self-discovery which not only helps you to be stronger but also makes you able to see the world beyond yourself.

This research has taken into account the theoretical framework of spirituality given by Rivers Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) and by Lisa Miller in her book *The Awakened Brain* (2021). They talk about spirituality as one of the techniques being used during the Covid-19 pandemic to overcome its trauma and fear. They suggest spirituality as a therapy for mental health issues like existentialism and absurdism. They also claim that spirituality helps to deal with issues like isolation and loneliness.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN & FRAMEWORK

In this chapter the researcher has discussed the research design and theoretical framework of the study. This chapter talks about the overall plan; the researcher has selected to conduct this study. It discusses in detail the approach and method that has been conducted for this research and the theoretical framework that has been applied to understand and predict the patterns of character's behaviors under specific situations.

3.1 Research Design

The research is qualitative, which is the in-depth investigation and understanding of how individuals experience and see the world around. Social researchers deal with such social viewpoints and frameworks which are increasingly changing because of rapid social shifts. Therefore, traditional research methodologies fail to employ inductive reasoning. Thus, qualitative research method is used to investigate the problem, as it the eventual source of meaning making process, which entails an outline for making "a generalization" and deducing "a theory or explanation" (Kumar 142).

The researcher has adopted the phenomenological approach to investigating the problem, as it takes into account the lived experiences of individuals for understanding and seeing the world through their experience. Creswell states in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2007) that a Phenomenological study "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell 57). To put it another way, it is the description of a phenomenon that all the contributors have experienced. Consequently, themes, patterns and trends emerging from the research process can help to understand the real-world situations from the lens of characters in the chosen fictional writings of and about Covid-19.

The study has used thematic analysis as a method of research and has explored spiritual and existential themes in the selected novels to have a deep insight of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of the characters in the texts under study. One technique for assessing qualitative data is thematic analysis. It is typically used to find frequent themes, concepts, and patterns of meaning, the researcher

carefully scrutinizes the data identify the themes and recurring ideas. The study has adopted thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke as a method to examine the texts under study. Braun and Clarke have established the technique of systematically creating codes within the data to analyze themes in their book *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (2021), this method is known as thematic analysis. The method suggests reading and re-reading the data to become familiar with it. Each text is coded using a combination of deductive and inductive coding techniques in order to identify recurring themes in the stories. It is an organic approach in order to extract further material and facilitate the clustering of codes into similar themes. Finally, reviewing and naming of the themes and reporting those themes as results in the discussion. Briefly, thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in data (Braun & Clarke 2021).

Six phases of Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke:

- Familiarization with the data
 - Reading and re-reading the data (e.g., texts, interviews, literary works).
 - Notes and initial observations.
- Generating initial codes
 - Highlighting the key features.
 - Code relevant parts systematically.
- Searching for themes
 - Grouping codes into potential themes.
 - Identifying meaningful patterns.
- Reviewing themes
 - Refining themes: combine, split, or discard as needed.
 - Ensuring themes accurately reflect the data.
- Defining and naming themes
 - Clearly define the essence of each theme.
 - Naming them in a way that captures their scope and focus.
- Producing the report

- Final analysis and write-up.
- Relate the themes to your research question and literature.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In this research the novels *Burntcoat* and *Wish You Were Here* have been examined in the light of the theoretical framework of spirituality given by Forrest Rivers and Lisa Miller in their respective books. As both the novels are based on the stories of Covid-19, the researcher has deeply studied the characters in order to understand how the fear and stress of pandemic has impacted their mental health, how the theme of isolation and loneliness is presented in the texts under study and how they survived with the help of spirituality as a powerful tool to overcome stress and anxiety.

During the time of the Covid-19 pandemic spirituality has played an important role in dealing with mental health issues. Spirituality is defined as an aspect of humanity that refers to the process of seeking purpose and meaning of life. Spirituality in terms of psychology is discovering your own self, connection between body and soul. In the research paper “The Role of Spirituality in the Covid-19 Pandemic: a spiritual hotline project” scholars have highlighted the role of spirituality to deal with mental health issues caused by the pandemic due to distress and “social isolation” (Riberio et al. 855). Spirituality answers all the questions about the existence of being and what it means to be truly happy and satisfied. The true essences of spirituality are meditation, mindfulness, nature, art, and volunteering. For this purpose, the texts under observation have been interpreted through the theoretical lens of spirituality given by Forrest Rivers and Lisa Miller in their respective books.

For the deep study of the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of people surviving through it the researcher has taken into account the viewpoint of Rivers Forrest from his book *Covid-19 and Humanities Spiritual Awakening* (2021). Forrest has called Covid-19 a herald of great turmoil. He explains how these tough times separate us and makes us feel terrified, alone and divided (Forrest 10). The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives forever. It has an everlasting effect on the minds of people who survived through it. He claims that it appeared as something unbearable with all the death tolls, unemployment, and medical emergency but ultimately it has brought us all together. It has given us a sense of unity, and it has made us realize that we do not exist in isolation; we only exist as a unit. This pandemic has made us realize

how important it is to feel for others and to help them in times of crisis. Furthermore, Forrest talks about fears and anxieties of existence and how the virus has strengthened the idea. Forrest claims that the fear of death and being unable to find the meaning and purpose of life leads people to hopelessness and chaos. It makes them question their own existence.

The researcher has used the concept of isolation and loneliness given by Forrest in his book as a guideline to examine the themes in the texts under study. Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanities Spiritual Awakening* (2021) talks about his concept of isolation and loneliness during the tough time of Covid-19. He debates that this isolation is not only a test but also a chance to learn more about ourselves. Forrest calls isolation and loneliness an opportunity to “reconcile” and rebuild our broken relationships. He calls social isolation a blessing in disguise as it has given us a chance to rethink our lives. Forrest claims that this challenging time is an opportunity to gain experience and change for the better. Forrest explains the situation during the Covid-19 pandemic as “public health crisis has been something of a collective blessing in disguise” (Forrest 11).

Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) presents spirituality as a way to deal with the impacts of the pandemic. He discusses the Covid-19 pandemic and how it is the time of humanity's spiritual awakening. He discusses the change in attitudes of people towards spirituality and religion, starting with World War II, when science and technology had taken over the human mind. People were working like machines and had forgotten the purpose and meaning of life. The pandemic has taken us back to our roots where one can connect with self and tries to find out the purpose of this mortal life (Rivers 46-58). Forrest also argues that this challenging time is also a blessing in disguise because it gives us the liberty to make a choice and start again with a better understanding of life. As Forrest says “The choice is yours. Use your gift of free will wisely” (Forrest 44).

Miller has her own perspective about being isolated and lonely. Researcher has used her framework to identify the theme of isolation and loneliness in the texts under study. Miller claims that modern human beings are suffering from stress and depression in some way or the other despite having a normal life one feels hollow from inside. We feel that something is missing, life could be more meaningful, happy, rewarding and satisfying. It leads a person to depression and suicidal thoughts as he feels worthless.

Its spirituality that comes for the rescue to deal with mental health issues and it also helps to find the hidden meaning of life. Miller declares “that we are suffering epidemic levels of loneliness, but humans are inherently connected through shared consciousness and spirituality” (Miller 67).

Lisa Miller in her book *The Awakened Brain* (2021) talks about two realities she explains that one reality is our everyday world where we live and do things accordingly. On the other hand, we have another reality, the reality of our inner world where we live with our own terms and conditions where nothing binds us to limit ourselves. Where there are no boundaries and according to Miller that is the “Absolute Reality”. Miller suggests turning ourselves towards absolute reality which will ultimately lead us towards connectedness and belonging. Miller calls this connection the core of spirituality. Miller elaborates in her book by saying “it’s an intuitive knowing of interconnectedness that we are not alone and separate from other beings” (Miller 234).

Miller’s framework suggests spirituality as a useful technique to deal with the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic. Lisa Miller in her book *The Awakened Brain* (2021) purposes spirituality as a technique to survive through the devastating impacts of Covid-19 pandemic. She discusses that humans are invariably provided with the “capacity for spirituality” (46). It gives that required strength to the human mind to bounce back from challenging times. Miller’s spiritual knowledge is based on the study of neuroscience; she claims that a spiritually awakened mind is more innovative and creative. Spirituality is defined as an aspect of humankind that refers to the process of seeking purpose and meaning of life. Spirituality in terms of psychology is discovering your own self, connection between body and soul. Spirituality answers all the questions about the existence of being and what it means to be truly happy and satisfied. The true essences of spirituality are meditation, mindfulness, nature, art, and volunteering. Spirituality of psychology deals with all the practical experiences of life. Spirituality allows you to explore yourself and the world around, it gives you the liberty to be yourself and follow your instincts and create what is useful not just for you but also for the people around you (Miller 29-58).

Miller talks about the times of crisis as an opportunity for growth, she describes challenges as a wakeup call to be prepared for the future. As she says, “It has often been times of great challenge that have brought opportunities for growth” (Miller 237). She

claims that it is only in tough circumstances that people progress because hardships make you stronger and resilient. It gives you the strength to overcome your fears and be the best version of yourself for society and people around. Miller in her book *The Awakened Mind* defines two modes of awareness the “Achieving Awareness” and “Awakened Awareness”, achieving awareness focuses on individual goals it helps to decide what you actually want and how to achieve that goal. Whereas awakened awareness is based on connection and unity with others and the world as a whole. Miller suggests integrating both as a perfect combination as she says, “I lean into the flow of life, paying attention to where doors open and close” (Miller 183).

3.2.1 Forrest Rivers’ Concept of Spirituality

Forrest Rivers has developed the concept of spirituality and how it helps during the time of difficulty in his book *COVID-19 and Humanity’s Spiritual Awakening* (2021). The book includes many eye-opening incidents during the health emergency of Covid-19. Rivers talks about how the virus has helped to awaken the intuitive seeds of acknowledgement and wisdom. The Covid-19 pandemic has turned the globe upside down it has changed the ways people used to live or in other words now we all have to live with the new normal forever. Rivers claims that Covid-19 has made us face our “existential anxieties,” it has cleared the way for many productive, creative, and useful thoughts. Frontline workers are the best example of it; they work the whole time selflessly for humanity. They saved millions of lives and proved that humans are capable of doing anything if they do not let their fear stop them. This is also a reminder that this life is so unpredictable, and we are not going to live here forever. This suffering is not just a reminder but also a blessing in disguise as it is an awakening call for humanity. Suffering is an awakening call; it gives a soulful direction to humanity (Dass 9).

Time of crisis is also a time of realization; it makes you aware of all the strengths and weaknesses you have and gives you the courage to break the shell and embrace the truth. Social isolation and lockdowns during Covid-19 make people realize that we cannot exist without each other. This makes us understand the “spiritual value” of unity, love, sacrifice, and togetherness. Rivers claims that when Covid-19 hit the world we all get busy with the updates of deadly viruses and spend most of our time on TV and computers. It has created more fear, anxiety, and uncertainty within us. He suggests focusing on soulful activities like meditation, “creative expression” and “nature walk” during the tough times, this is the only way to bring mental peace. Rivers also talks

about “let go, let God mantra and says that this brings more clarity, mental peace, and balance in life, it gives you the freedom to live a peaceful life. Spirituality in terms of psychology is discovering your own self, connection between body and soul. It guides a person to find the meaning and purpose of life, and to have a goal to achieve.

Covid-19 has also changed the definition of freedom for the people of different fields. For some people freedom is just to roam around freely without any restrictions like social distancing and lockdown whereas for others it is to work without any interruption. This testing time has made us all realize that we are all connected with each other, and we should change our perspective of what we call freedom or rather we should focus on what is good for all of us (Rivers 25-29). Anxiety and isolation during the pandemic are understandable but at the same time this social isolation has given us a chance to use this time to understand ourselves and give more time to our families. It is the time of spiritual growth and meditation which will bring ultimate mental peace. Meditation helps us to be kind and helpful to the people around us and motivates a person to be a good human being and make this world a better place to live.

3.2.2 Lisa Miller’s Concept of Spirituality

Lisa Miller in her book *The Awakened Brain* talks about psychological spirituality, she states that a spiritually awakened mind is more peaceful, creative, and productive. Being a psychologist, she reveals that meditation and spiritual activities help the nervous system to calm down. Miller indicates spirituality as “a set of comforting beliefs to lean on in challenging times. She shares the details of her experiment in psychological laboratory that during the time of depression and stress the human brain becomes so weak and thin whereas the brain becomes healthier and thicker when a person engages in spiritual activities. Spirituality is not just a practice during challenging times but a protection against negativity and suffering. Spirituality brings a broader view of life; it makes you see the world with a different perspective and bring positive energy. It guides you to discover yourself, the world around and make a better place to live. Spirituality gives meaning to life; it helps you to find the purpose of your existence and motivates you to achieve the set goal or target. Miller also points out that there are people who are doing great in their lives, but they are not satisfied and happy with that, they feel that there is more to their success and happiness. They feel that they are hollow from inside, that is where spirituality intervenes and fills the space with love, kindness, and hope.

There is a strong connection between spirituality and mental health. Depression and fear are associated with tragedy and trauma, and this leads a person to negative and suicidal thoughts. Depression is a part of modern life by some way or the other, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, the uncertain and shocking situation makes people depressed and fearful. Spirituality comes to rescue people from hopelessness and despair. It gives a person the required strength to face difficulties, learn from such experiences and ultimately live a happy and healthy life. This is not only useful for one as an individual but also becomes an inspiration for the people around us.

Both Rivers and Miller have highlighted the importance of spirituality in the time of crisis and how spirituality plays the role of a savior. It gives that required strength to the human mind to bounce back from challenging times. Spirituality gives you the liberty to be yourself and follow your instincts and create what is useful not just for you but also for the people around you. Rivers in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* talks about the Covid-19 pandemic and how it is the time of humanity's spiritual awakening. He discusses the change in attitudes of people towards spirituality and religion when science and technology took over the human mind. The Covid-19 pandemic has made us all realize that we all are connected with each other, and we should change our perspective of what we call freedom or rather we should focus on what is good for all of us.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The chapter addresses how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of people; the theme of isolation and loneliness depicted in the novels; and finally, how spirituality has helped the characters to cope with mental health issues. It brings into light the devastating nature of Covid-19 and its effects on the globe economically, socially, and psychologically. During the challenging times of pandemic people were lacking the fundamental mutual support which comes through socialization as different strategies like lockdowns, social distancing, smart working, and work from home have been used worldwide to tackle the challenges dictated by the pandemic.

Through the analysis of the selected texts, this chapter will address the impacts of Covid-19 on the mental health of people through the perspectives of the main characters of the novels under study. The study will examine how isolation and loneliness are depicted in the chosen novels, exploring the factors and circumstances that have led to increased stress and anxiety during and after the Covid-19 period. This chapter will also highlight the vital role spirituality has played in dealing with the effects of Covid-19 virus.

4.1 *Wish You Were Here* (2021) by Jodi Picoult

The novel *Wish You Were Here* (2021) is about “the resilience of the human spirit in a moment of crisis” (Picoult 25). The story is set in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic. It is told in first person narrative, and is the tale of Diana O’Toole, who lives with her boyfriend Finn. She works as an associate specialist in an art auction company and seems to be living a perfect life as she says “when I grew up I had a whole plan... I’m perfectly on track” (Picoult 5-6). They are planning a vacation to an island named Galapagos but at the last moment Finn refuses to go as he breaks the news of Covid-19 and he as a doctor cannot leave. At first, Covid-19 seems like any other disease as Diana explains “wash your hands and don’t touch your face,” he told me. “It’s going to be fine” (Picoult 4). Diana leaves for a vacation without her boyfriend and gets stuck there because of the lockdown as borders are closed and everyone is under quarantine. Far away from her own people and everything familiar Diana has to confront the

exceptional circumstances through a journey of connection, realization, and self-reflection.

Before going to the island Diana has a sketch of a perfect life in her mind, she has a plan for future as she mentions while talking to Finn “I’ve visualized, I’ve manifested” (Picoult 15). She is excited about the future. She thinks Finn is going to propose to her during their vacation and she seems eager to be engaged to Finn. Whereas when she comes back, she is a changed person she no longer believes on planning life “You can’t plan your life, Finn,’ I say quietly, because then you have a plan. Not a life” (Picoult 273). The pandemic has changed the way of living forever, it has affected everyone on the planet in some way or the other. Diana starts seeing her life with a different perspective after she comes back, she perceives the world around with a different eye, she realizes that life is not about living up to others expectations as she quotes “The point is, if someone abandons you, it may be less about you and more about them” (Picoult 96).

Diana learns about herself and the world around her when she is isolated, she finds the meaning of life in the midst of chaos. She discovers herself while on the island because there she gets time to reflect upon her own existence. At the end while talking to Finn she admits that “It doesn’t matter to me if nothing ever goes back to normal, because I don’t want to go backward” (Picoult 272). She also admits that “something has changed in me” (Picoult 262). After her discovery she becomes able to amend her relationship with her mother, which was the biggest setback in her life. She learns that there is always another side to the truth, and we need to take a step forward to get to the end as she says, “There are two ways of looking at walls” (Picoult 96). Finally, she becomes able to fill in the gaps between herself and her mother as she no longer lives with her misunderstandings. She starts believing in forgiving and trying to see things on the other side to take a rational decision which makes it easier for you to move forward. She has more clarity on life; her vision is clear she no longer believes on planning things “nobody is guaranteed tomorrow” (Picoult 264).

When Diana comes back to reality and gets to know about being Covid-19 positive and being on ventilator for a week or so. It becomes difficult for her to digest the reality as she has been experiencing the different reality throughout, she explains it by saying “I don’t know what’s real anymore” (Picoult 181). She feels disconnected from the real world, and when she tries to make connections she fails, eventually she

comes to the conclusion that it is not important to figure out what has happened to her, more important thing is to implement what she has learned through this journey of self-awareness. To make sense of what has happened to her she tries to connect with people online who have been through similar experiences. It helps her a lot to understand that it is normal not to be able to connect with people around, you cannot force them to believe in your reality, nor do they have any right to manipulate your reality. Everyone has their own version of reality, and they live by it. She also consults a psychiatrist for help who explains her that “we humans love to find patterns and when you can’t find patterns it’s unsettling” (Picoult 230). It is when she realizes that she needs to accept her own patterns in life that is her reality. Finally, by the end she admits “you may not be able to choose your reality. But you can change it” (Picoult 273).

The Covid-19 pandemic has left people in a state of shock and fear. It has made people question their existence as it has elevated the sense of displacement. It has forced people into isolation and social distancing which resulted in the fear of being trapped into social boundaries set by the governing bodies. The pandemic has made people enquire about the purpose of this temporary life as in the novel *Wish You Were Here* the main character Diana starts questioning her life decisions during her alone time on the island. Isolation and loneliness lead her to find her true self.

Both the theorists Rivers and Miller have highlighted the importance of spirituality in the time of crisis and how spirituality plays the role of a savior. It gives that required strength to the human mind to bounce back from challenging times. Spirituality gives you the liberty to be yourself and follow your instincts and create what is useful not just for you but also for the people around you.

4.1.1 Pandemic as an Existential Threat in *Wish You Were Here*

Existential threat has been one of the greatest fears of Covid-19, it has badly impacted the mental health of people during the pandemic. Existential anxiety itself is a mental health condition which makes people question their own existence. It gives people the feeling of displacement and anxiety that they do not belong to the place or circumstances they are in. In the novel *Wish You Were Here* (2021) the main character Diana feels helpless and dislodged when she finds herself stuck alone on an island where she has no choice but to adjust without shelter and food. At first everything appears strange and new for her, and she regrets her decision to stay there when she

already knew that island is closing for two weeks. As she explains “I wonder why I assumed it was safe to wander an unfamiliar island by myself” (Picoult 28). It is impossible for her to adjust to a completely different world where she even cannot understand or speak the same language as locals. This instance shows how loneliness and isolation results in mental instability and stress.

Covid-19 has been felt like a threat to human survival and existence. Rivers Forrest in his framework also talks about the anxieties and fear of existence during the time of pandemic in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) Forrest talks about “existential anxieties and fears” that this virus has brought with it. The fear of death, the inability to find meaning and lack of self-reliance leads people to chaos and despair. Forrest talks about elderly people and those with special health conditions who are more likely to catch the virus because of their weak immune system. Their fear and anxiety of death makes it difficult for them to live in the present. Forrest also brings into light the hazards of medical professionals and frontline workers. In the novel *Wish You Were Here* (2021) the character Hannah O'Toole (Diana's mother) gets affected by the virus and dies of it. Finn as a doctor also mentions how the virus is more deadly for older people and for those who are already suffering from other diseases. Finn in his conversations with Diana through emails when she was on the island mentions how he is fearful of catching the virus as he says “I know I took an oath. But I don't remember saying I'd kill myself to do it” (Picoult 97).

Having no plan, no expectations from anyone around and no fear of being judged gives Diana the freedom to live by her own choices. She realizes that she has been caged throughout her life by the idea of having a perfect life. She also finds out that the ultimate happiness is in attaining the inner peace. This peacefulness gives you the liberty to find joy in the present. Diana awakens from her dream in a hospital and discovers that all she has been engaged to was just a hallucination. She finds it difficult to choose between both the realities. She rather relates more with the reality which was in fact just a dream. She explains it by saying “I don't know what's real anymore” (Picoult 181). She feels like an alien being around with the same people she has been living with for years she fails to connect with them. She tells her nurse that “I have lost time, and people, and maybe my mind” (Picoult 181).

The Covid-19 pandemic has not only made people question our existence and the purpose of this temporary life, but it is also responsible for challenging the social

connection between people. The Covid-19 pandemic has terrified people by isolating them socially and giving them separation anxiety. Forrest's theoretical framework of spirituality intervenes to suggest useful techniques to overcome the stress and anxiety of uncertain situations. Rivers claims that when Covid-19 hit the world we all get busy with the updates of deadly viruses and spend most of the time on TV and computers. It has given us more fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. He suggests focusing on soulful activities like meditation, "creative expression" and "nature walk" during the tough times, this is the only way to bring mental peace. Eventually Diana manages to conquer her anxiety and fears and becomes able to adapt to the world around. She learns new ways of living with her new connections on the island, and a good relationship with a local family helps her a lot in making sense of the world she is living in. Gradually she finds herself questioning the choice she has made in the past. Her journey on the island helps her discover her true self.

4.1.2 Pandemic and Separation Anxieties

Separation anxiety is a mental health condition that affected most of the people around the globe during the pandemic. Deep analysis of *Wish You Were Here* highlights the impacts of loneliness and social isolation on the main characters. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives forever. It has left an everlasting impact on the minds of people who survived through it. Rivers Forrest has called Covid-19 a herald of great turmoil. He explains how these tough times separate us and makes us feel terrified, alone and divided (Forrest 10). The novel *Wish You Were Here* (2021) is filled with examples of where the Covid-19 pandemic has been a disaster and a tragedy which splits people apart. Diana highlights how New York City, which used to be a city full of life and tourists, is losing its liveliness. "My eyes jump from headline to headline: state of emergency declared" (Picoult 16). Diana also reports the same about Galapagos Island through her postcard to Finn "It's not going to be the vacation I expected, tourism (and everything else commercial) is shut down here" (Picoult 42). It seems like the world is falling apart and everything is shut down and there is no socialization of any sort occurring.

In the story Diana suffers through childhood trauma because of the separation from her mother at an early stage of her life. It results in a lifetime conflict between the mother and her daughter. Diana finds it impossible to fill in the gaps and be able to live a normal life again with her mother. Temporary separation between Diana and Finn

also results in the end of their relationship. Diana expresses her feelings as “It feels wrong, so wrong, to go without Finn” (Picoult 26). The distance and lack of communication between both disconnect them from each other. On the other hand, Beatriz, the girl Diana meets on the island, also suffers through childhood trauma because of the separation of her parents. Beatriz is a fourteen-year-old who tries to find love and affection outside her home, and she successfully gets great help from the family she lives with in Santa Cruz. The pandemic separates Beatriz yet again from her loved ones and she ends up harming herself as Diana tells Gabriel “I saw her cutting herself” (Picoult 75).

The Covid-19 pandemic has redefined the concept of sustainability. It has challenged us to rethink the future of our planet and existence. The article “How Covid-19 Redefines the Concept of Sustainability” has discussed in detail that the current definition of sustainability is not justified anymore as it only talks about economic, social, and environmental issues whereas human health has emerged as one of the major concerns during the time of pandemic. They suggest that human health should be taken as a fourth pillar for sustainability (Hakovirta et al. 3727). In the book *Wish You Were Here* (2021) Finn and Diana have been seen planning their future together, their idea of a perfect life involves their own house, financial stability and having enough money to pay bills while roaming around the world. Everything changes with the arrival of pandemic Finn, as a doctor explains how disheartening it is to see people dying in front of you and you are unable to save them as there is still no proper treatment for the virus. Finn only realizes the importance of their relationship when he almost lost Diana as he says, “I almost lost you, if I ever needed a lesson that was it” (Picoult 185). Diana also understands the importance of health when she goes to rehab, and she has to relearn everything yet again. The nurse in the rehab explains Diana “Honey, you’re through the worst of it, you have a second chance” (Picoult 176).

Forrest calls isolation and loneliness an opportunity to “reconcile” and rebuild our broken relationships. He calls social isolation a blessing in disguise as it has given us a chance to rethink our lives. Forrest claims that this challenging time is an opportunity to gain experience and change for the better. After surviving the pandemic there is a great shift in the thinking of all the characters in the story, they no longer crave worldly things; rather they are more into having sound health of both body and mind.

Loneliness is the feeling of being separated or alone whereas social isolation is the restriction on social gatherings and living with the same small group of people. One can feel lonely while surrounded by people and similarly one can be alone but not lonely at all. It all depends on the inner peace and satisfaction. People who suffer through social isolation and loneliness ends up having anxiety, depression, dementia, and death. Lisa Miller's framework suggests that being alone and lonely are two different states, in her book *The Awakened Brain* (2021) she talks about two realities she explains that one reality is our everyday world where we live and do things accordingly. On the other hand, we have another reality, the reality of our inner world where we live with our own terms and conditions where nothing binds us to limit ourselves. Where there are no boundaries and according to Miller that is the "Absolute Reality". Miller, in her theory of spirituality, discussed in her book *The Awakened Brain*, suggests turning ourselves towards absolute reality which will lead us towards connectedness and belonging. Miller calls this connection the core of spirituality. Miller elaborates in her book by saying "it's an intuitive knowing of interconnectedness that we are not alone and separate from other beings" (Miller 234).

Wish You Were Here (2021) is filled with characters suffering through isolation and loneliness. Hannah O'Toole, Diana's mother, is a patient of dementia. She has been in a care facility for two years. Her regret of not being a perfect mother to her daughter and a good partner for her husband leads her into severe mental illness and depression. She ends up on the bed of facility care confessing to her daughter that she has been an absolute failure being her mother. Always running behind her materialistic goals and not getting time for herself and her family leads Hannah to a tragic death and Diana says adieu to her mother on facetime, this shows that our negligence in any relationship lead us to nothing but a bad end.

The last thing I say during our call is that it's okay for her to leave, if she has to. I realize she's been waiting to hear those words from me her whole life, because less than an hour later, The Greens calls to tell me she has passed away (Picoult 263).

Diana feels lonely as she touches her destination Galapagos without Finn, not being able to talk to anyone because of the language barrier she even feels more alone as she explains "A very beautiful set, but a very lonely one" (Picoult 57). Friendship with Beatriz helps Diana to fill in the gap which was there because of the lack of company.

After her journey of realization when Diana comes back to the real world she goes through the same process of loneliness and disconnection because she no longer relates with the world she has been living throughout her life as she tells Finn she is “just... frustrated. And really, really lonely” (Picoult 190). She elaborates her feelings as “I was alone a lot in the Galapagos but I wasn’t lonely, like I’m here” (Picoult 193). Diana also mentions that she used to get frustrated when subways were always full of people but with the new normal and in the world of social distancing, she feels lonely at public places too. The empty roads, parks and buildings haunt her and makes her feel that she does not belong here.

Kitomi (with whom Diana was dealing for the auction of a painting) a fifty-seven years old lady shares her thoughts with Diana during their walk in the park that she feels so grateful for her decision of not selling her painting right before the lockdown because it has been her only companion throughout her alone time during the pandemic as she says “I would have been quite lonely, without it” (Picoult 271). It also shows the difference between being alone and being lonely is a different experience for every person individually. This also reveals that it is not important to have someone along with whom you can talk and share your feelings with, but the more important thing is to have a sense of inner satisfaction and belongingness. Their fruitful discussion also serves as a guidance for Diana to move forward in the right direction and reach her destination.

Covid-19 pandemic has combined two very odd term together these are “isolation” and “shared experience”. The concept of isolation is being absolutely alone and there is no socialization at all whereas shared experiences are those which we experience together as members of the same society or community. Covid-19 has affected the whole world, and it has made us all wonder how we only exist as one whole unit which cannot work properly if divided into pieces. As Diana explains the situation as “At the very end of life, no matter what your net worth is and the length of your CV, the only thing you want is someone beside you, holding your hand” (Picoult 303).

The theme of isolation and loneliness is the core idea of the novel *Wish You Were Here* (2021) it is that loneliness which leads Diana toward the path of self-realization and helps her in finding the hidden meaning of life which is to live for inner peace and satisfaction rather than materialistic things of this temporary world. During her journey on the island Diana gets time to contemplate her life and finally decide in

which direction she wants to move forward. Her journey of isolation and loneliness turns into a journey of finding herself and her true happiness. Rivers Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanities Spiritual Awakening* (2021) calls isolation and loneliness an opportunity to “reconcile” and rebuild our broken relationships. It seems true if we take the example of the relationship between Diana and her mother from the story of *Wish You Were Here*. When Diana goes to Galapagos, far away from her mother and there she gets the news of her death she feels helpless and hopeless. This time of separation becomes the time of reconciliation for the relationship between them, because when she comes back to the real world, she no longer feels distant from her mother rather she feels the need to meet her even if she doesn’t recognize her anymore because of her mental health condition. As Diana explains that “in crisis, we go to a place that comforts us. For me it’s here [with her mother]” (Picoult 227-228). Her mother becomes her source of comfort and strength during her tough times when she is struggling to find her true self and trying to figure out the reality on which she can rely.

4.1.3 Pandemic and Spiritual Awakening

Rivers Forrest, in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening*, calls the pandemic a moment of awakening for humanity, stating that "the immense suffering the virus has created, has had the effect of awakening humanity" (Forrest 8). He argues that it was a wake-up call for all of us to escape the "mindless conformity" and pursue something bigger than life itself. He emphasizes the importance of the inner self, the "absolute reality." He suggests being more compassionate and soulful rather than being overly indulged in temporary things. According to Forrest, our ultimate destiny is to evolve into more sympathetic and soulful beings. He calls this time of crisis a blessing in disguise (Forrest 11). As he explains, this time is a break from our monotonous lives and it is high time to reflect on our lives and be considerate of what we want and what we're doing. It is an opportunity for us to choose what our hearts and minds desire and they long for nothing but peace and satisfaction.

Wish You Were Here by Jodi Picoult is a story about a moment of awakening; it is the story of Diana's journey of self-discovery and coming out as a humbler and more thoughtful person. Diana on her soulful journey realizes that she has been on the wrong path all her life, and she has been making wrong decisions. She discovers that all her plans and dreams of a perfect future are nothing else but an allusion. She learns that even less is more when more is no good. The pandemic sets a great example for

that when people are craving basic things like socialization and going out for work. She also realizes that everyone around is going through their tragedy and we as a part of the same community should show some compassion and empathy. As she explains "Because of this pandemic, everyone feels like they've been robbed of something" (Picoult 264). It signifies that we are not alone in this suffering, we all are in the same boat and will find a way out to save this drowning ship. The way out is unity, connection, and belongingness. The way out is spirituality.

One of the main aspects of spirituality is compassion as Forrest has explained in his book and it is very evident that this Covid-19 pandemic has made people more compassionate towards each other. People are more united in this period of social isolation and lockdowns. This pandemic has also made us realize that we only exist in communities and groups with shared human experiences. Diana connects with other Covid survivors through online communities; it helps her to understand her complex situation and whatever she has been going through. Diana explains it by saying "I realize that I'm not crazy. That I'm not alone" (Picoult 220). Diana also consults a psychologist for help when she finds it difficult to make sense of the world around her because she feels caged in both realities and it appears impossible for her to choose one. Her therapist suggests she meditate and have conversations with friends (connectedness), both are very important and basic aspects of spirituality. This process of meaning-making and a gradual journey toward peace and satisfaction is the journey toward a spiritually awakened mind and soul.

Forrest calls suffering a blessing in disguise because it gives us the power and energy to fight the demons of the inside and the outside world and bounce back as warriors. The same is the case in Diana's journey, her suffering makes her strong and courageous, and it gives her that true identity she has been longing for so long. She comes out as a more spiritual person who no longer gets distracted by the little hardships of life. By the end of her journey, Diana learns new ways of living where it takes less to be happy and satisfied as she says, "I feel impossibly light, like I am made of air and thought" (Picoult 273). Diana finally visits the Galapagos after breaking up with Finn, she goes there to relive the memories of her alternative reality (dream) and also to complete her thesis on how reliable memories are. She elucidates by saying "The only way to make meaning is to make sure no one else goes through what you did" (Picoult

297). Considering others is one of the key ideas of spirituality that enables us to take care of other's emotions too and make this world a better place to live.

Spirituality is seen as one of the saviors during the tough times of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been a great help to maintain sanity and proceed with a more positive and innovative mind. Lisa Miller in her book *The Awakened Mind* (2021) defines two modes of awareness "Achieving Awareness" and "Awakened Awareness", achieving awareness focuses on individual goals it helps to decide what you want and how to achieve that goal. Whereas awakened awareness is based on connection and unity with others and the world as a whole. Miller suggests integrating both as a perfect combination as she says, "I lean into the flow of life, paying attention to where doors open and close" (Miller 183). Diana, the protagonist of *Wish You Were Here* by Jodi Picoult, is seen achieving both modes of awareness through her journey of self-realization. She ends up attaining "achieving awareness" when she first visits the Galapagos in her dreams, after the realization she ends up making rational decisions based on what she wants to achieve a happy and sound life. She ends her relationship with Finn "You're not just perfect for me" (Picoult 273). Diana also decides that she wants to change her career as well, she starts PhD in Art Therapy. By the end she manages to accomplish awakened awareness as well, it is evident when she talks about saving others from the trauma and tragedy we have suffered otherwise there would be no use in that suffering if it does not help others to learn through their experiences.

Spirituality is an individual exercise that often includes having a purpose in life, the process of meaning-making, and a sense of peace and connection with others. Diana seems delighted to discover the path of spirituality and use it as a technique to recover from her sufferings because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Spirituality allows us to have purpose, meaning, and connection in times of crisis, it also helps to have a strong immune system against fear and frustration while suffering through tough times. Spirituality is not just a practice to get rid of trauma and negative thoughts, but also a guard that protects you from coming danger. Spirituality does not only help Diana to overcome her fears and lead a balanced and fulfilled life, but it also provides Diana with a road map to proceed further in the right direction and be very sure whatever she does she is doing it out of her own will and not to satisfy any other person around. It makes Diana mature enough to choose what she actually wants and ends all types of confusion and drama in her life permanently.

Talking about memories and learnings from the past Diana says, "Memories are the safeguards we use to keep from making the same mistakes" (Picoult 297). Diana argues that the only way is not to repeat the same mistakes ever again and she also emphasizes the fact that they save others as well to suffer through the same tragedy as you. She stresses the point that your experience of suffering should be a helping hand for coming generations not to commit the same mistake rather it should pave the way for them. After getting a degree in 'Art Therapy' Diana started working with people who have suffered through the Covid-19 pandemic, her own experience helps her even more in understanding and relating to her patients. She finally chooses to be where she feels herself. Her actual journey to the Galapagos helps her to revisit her memories of her dream and this time with her eyes open.

Conclusively the Covid-19 pandemic has shaken the whole world. It has made us realize how vulnerable we are but at the same time, it has made us understand that our strength is in unity. We are strong when we are connected. Furthermore, it has also taught us the importance of being self-sufficient. In the novel *Wish You Were Here* (2021) Diana learns about herself when she is isolated from the world, she realizes that her happiness lies in not being judged by the people around her. Diana learns through her self-discovery journey that she has bound herself through her idea of having a perfect life as in reality there is no such thing as called perfect life. During her last meeting with Finn Diana tells him that you are perfect but not perfect for me, it shows that she has realized that everyone lives by their idea of a perfect life and it varies from person to person.

4.2 *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall

Burntcoat by Sarah Hall is the story of a sculptor Edith Harkness who lives in Britain. The story is written in first person narrative. It is a tale of disaster, suffering, and human connection set during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. *Burntcoat* perfectly captures the ride of emotions during the height of the pandemic. It is also a story of two lovers who are confined in an art studio named Burntcoat and they barely know each other. The disintegrating world brings them closer and at the same time, they are losing each other because of the deadly virus.

Edith starts her new journey with Halit, her boyfriend and a restaurant owner. They find the idea of confinement very interesting and joyful as Edith explains "It did

not seem possible joy would be disrupted" (Hall 79). Edith and Halit try their best to get to know each other and find peace inside the Burntcoat when the outside world around them is falling apart. It seems devastating with everything around us closed and people fighting over food and other necessities of life. Edith explains how people are clueless about the current situation and are unable to cope with the circumstances. She also points out the lack of government support and aid during the crisis because the administration is also unable to comprehend the situation. Edith gets injured while saving a woman from a person who is after her for a piece of bread. She comes back home without food and tells Halit how the situation is getting worse and worse every passing day.

Edith longs for a strong human connection, which she finds in her intimate relationship with Halit. Their short but deep relationship makes her understand the importance and purpose of this temporary life. When Halit was extremely ill and was struggling for life, Edith was fearful, but she also realized her strength as a person. Their relationship is the highlight of the novel and Edith's life as well. It does not only bring them closer but also changes their life for the better. It makes Edith able to understand that the most important thing is to be there for loved ones when they need you and help them in difficult times. It gives you inner peace and satisfaction when you can do something for the people around you. The time pandemic turns out to be the time of realization for Edith and many others.

Hall has beautifully portrayed the fragile relationship between life and death. She has sublimely captured the essence of life, the uncertain nature of it. Through the character of Edith Harkness Hall has been able to capture the bitter reality of this mortal life. Edith struggles throughout her life for her identity, living with a single mother who is mentally unstable and being bullied for living in a small cottage without a family. She learns through her lifelong journey of self-discovery that the ultimate end is death and what matters the most is what you leave behind for others to learn from. Edith becomes popular because of her 40-ft-long sculpture known as 'Hecky' by the side of the motorway. At nearly sixty with her life fading away, Edith finally makes a memorial for the people who died during the pandemic and counts it her best piece of art.

Rivers in his stance about spirituality discussed in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* talks about the Covid-19 pandemic and how it is the time of humanity's spiritual awakening. He discusses the change in attitudes of people

towards spirituality and religion when science and technology took over the human mind. The Covid-19 pandemic has made us all realize that we all are connected, and we should change our perspective of what we call freedom or rather we should focus on what is good for all of us.

4.2.1 Existential Crises and Pandemic in *Burntcoat*

The story of *Burntcoat* revolves around the theme of existential crises, as Edith questions her existence throughout the novel. The feeling of displacement is always there in Edith's life journey she finds herself a misfit in this society even before the pandemic hit the world. The deadly virus elevates the existential quest of Edith.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made people challenge their existence, as it has changed the old way of living forever. It seems like a threatening wake-up call for people to wake up from their sleep of ignorance. Rivers Forrest in his theory talks about fears and anxieties of existence and how the virus has strengthened the idea. Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) claims that the fear of death and being unable to find the meaning and purpose of life leads people to hopelessness and chaos. It makes them question their existence. Forrest also argues that this challenging time is also a blessing in disguise because it gives us the liberty to make a choice and start again with a better understanding of life. As Forrest says "The choice is yours. Use your gift of free will wisely" (Forrest 44). In the novel *Burntcoat* (2021) Edith questions her existence throughout her life, she finds herself a misfit in society as she recalls her childhood without friends and family and how she has avoided any kind of social connection. Edith's life revolved around her mother only for a longer period and losing her mother was a real shock for her. Her mother's death transforms her life; she emphasizes more on the purity and diversity of their relation after the death of her mother.

Similarly, when Halit gets affected by the virus the thought of losing him puts Edith in a state of chaos, the fear of death makes her question herself that if she is unable to do any good for her partner in his time of need then how worthless she is as she says "anything I made, would become meaningless" (hall 104). She calls for help reaching out to helpline numbers and contacting the hospital's emergency, but she finds no help. She decides to give her best and do every possible thing to save her partner that ambition gives her strength to be the best version of herself.

Forrest in his theoretical model emphasizes the importance of connection as he states, "It is the illusion of separation that frustrates our attempts at peace in the first place" (Forrest 56). Forrest claims that there is a strong alliance between peace and connection, we are at peace when we are socially and spiritually connected with each other. Forrest also points out that only "spiritual seeking has the power to heal the division between groups of people and build peace among them" (Forrest 57). In the novel *Burntcoat*, the main character Edith Harkness suffers because of the lack of social connection with people around her, she finds herself in chaos, as she thinks she cannot survive alone. Existential crises lead to mental instability and depression; it makes people think that they do not belong to the world they are living in and the lack of connection with people around them makes them feel alone and isolated. She needs some help; she wishes to be with someone on whom she can rely emotionally. Edith has been in different relationships since her first art school; the kind of toxic relationship she had with her first boyfriend Ali shows how disparate she was for any kind of connection.

Edith finds peace and comfort when she finally builds a strong and deep bond with her boyfriend Halit, the connection between them gives them the strength to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Forrest also claims that peace and connection are linked, one cannot be achieved without the other. They seem excited at the beginning of the lockdown that this time of social isolation will give them time to be together and enjoy each other's company. Edith explains it as "It did not seem possible joy would be disrupted" (Hall 79). Even the idea of social isolation and lockdown fails to make them feel fearful because their peace and joy is to be together. Halit gets affected by the virus and the fear of death and losing him disturbs Edith's peace and transforms her life completely. She asks for help from every possible place, but she finds no medical help from anywhere for Halit as it is the time of social distancing and they prefer you to be home and take precautionary measures. As they say, the bad times bring out the best in you, the same happens with Edith. She comes out as victorious, she learns from her journey that self-reliance is the best possible way to achieve success because no one can help you the way you can do it for yourself. As Edith explains "I've experienced, altered in nature. I am burnt, damaged more resilient" (Hall 133). She takes care of Halit and helps him in every possible way. Forrest's theory of spirituality also talks about self-reliance as well in his book stating, "Becoming self-sufficient will also inevitably

deepen your relationship and sense of connection" (Forrest 62). Forrest claims that a sense of connection and self-reliance are interconnected because when you know who you are and what you are capable of it gives you that strength to fight the demons within and outside.

The Covid-19 pandemic has emerged as a traumatic global event; it has accelerated the existential threats. It has given rise to the feeling of purposelessness and aimlessness. It has made people think that they are worthless and capable of nothing. It has given people separation anxieties and depression as there was no social connection between them.

4.2.2 Pandemic and Social Isolation

During the time of confinement, Edith revisits her life and contemplates the decisions she has made in her past life. Edith had a tough childhood; she struggled throughout her journey. Her life is filled with miseries and challenges; she has been raised by a single mother who has suffered through mental illness because of a stroke. She learns through hard ways, but the suffering has made her strong enough to overcome hurdles and continue to be strong and resilient. The Covid-19 pandemic has trapped people in social isolation and physical distancing. The pandemic has challenged our social life, and it has changed our ways of thinking and living forever.

Sullivan in his research article "Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Loneliness and Social Isolation: A Multi-Country Study" talks about how Covid-19 has impacted on the mental health of those who are already living alone as it has elevated their feelings of loneliness and isolation. In the novel *Burntcoat*, the protagonist Edith Harkness feels lonelier and depressed during the pandemic because she has been alone throughout her life. Being part of a broken family and living with a mother who is suffering through mental illness Edith feels that hollowness even more during the time of social isolation. Edith shares her feelings saying "I've been asked about this too. How it is possible to live with fear and hope" (Hall 26). She smiles and answers that she has mastered the art of living through fears and anxieties. She has learned this art through hard ways. Similarly, Forrest in his perspective calls social isolation a blessing in disguise as it has given us a chance to rethink our lives. Loneliness is subjective whereas social isolation is defined as objecting to social environment. Edith's loneliness prior pandemic is the

outcome of her relationship but the isolation during the pandemic is forced once it has an objective attached to it which is to prevent the virus from spreading rapidly.

Forrest's theoretical perspective on spirituality claims that this challenging time is an opportunity to learn and change for the better. Forrest explains the situation during the Covid-19 pandemic as a "public health crisis has been something of a collective blessing in disguise" (Forrest 11). He claims that at first glance it appeared as something unbearable with all the death tolls, unemployment, and medical emergency but ultimately it has brought us all together. It has given us a sense of unity, and it has made us realize that we do not exist in isolation, rather we only exist as a unit. The pandemic has made us realize how important it is to feel for others and to help them in times of crisis. In the novel *Burntcoat* Edith's character learns through the miseries of her life that we only feel complete and satisfied when we give our best to save others from pain and suffering. The time spent with Halit when he was fighting for his life makes Edith realize her worth and that she is capable of doing anything and everything. It is spirituality as Forrest claims that gives a person the strength to cope with difficult times, it gives a sense of connection and satisfaction. Spirituality gives you the courage to be self-reliant.

Naomi (Edith's mother) is a great prominent writer; isolated from the world because she is mentally unstable and cannot connect with people around her. She has suffered a brain stroke and now is unable to communicate and function properly. Her husband leaves her because she does not fit in the picture of society's so-called perfect life. This shows how society has bound us to live up to the expectations of others and function according to the rules and laws made by society. Forrest in his book claims that Covid-19 is a "blessing" for those who feel "trapped" in the boundaries set by society. Edith explains that her mother's situation improves after isolating from the outside world as she says, "Naomi was improving; released from my father's expectations her progress was noticeable" (Hall 22). Edith's explanation brings to light the fact that we as humans grow at a higher pace when we are free from the expectations of others around us it gives us the liberty to choose what we want. Edith explains the isolation of her mother as an opportunity for her to get rid of her old self and be a better version of herself as she explains "The urge to migrate is the urge to escape and create, not recreate" (Hall 126). Edith highlights the fact that it is important to accept who we are to progress and flourish in life as she says, "We are who we are and there's little

point pretending otherwise" (Hall 6). Naomi's character in the novel *Burntcoat* highlights the harsh realities of this world, it is evidence that this society accepts only those who are beneficial and up to the mark. Naomi used to be a very popular person as a writer when she was doing well for society but when she got ill and barely did any good for the people around her even her husband left her alone.

Lisa Miller in her book *The Awakened Brain* (2021) compares the relationship between humans with the relationship between particles in quantum physics as she says "the relationship between particles so intimately linked that a change in one affects the other, even when they are separated at distance" (Miller 212). The novel *Burntcoat* is filled with such examples where it is observed that the pain of one person affects the other, and the change in one's behavior affects the behavior of another person as well. When Edith gets to know about the death of her father after many years of separation and also comes to know that she has a half-brother as well. She does not feel any emotion but once she meets her half-brother and sees how keen he is to know her in person and how much he cares for her she starts thinking about him differently. It shows that care and love change a person like nothing else, it provides a sustainable base for relationships to grow and flourish.

Similarly, Edith seems so anxious about how she will ever be able to talk to Halit's parents about his death, as they were isolated from the outside world during the tough times of the pandemic when he died. This also puts to light the fact that isolation brings social barriers between humans and the lack of communication results in complexities and misunderstandings. When she gets a call from Halit's father she feels hesitant to talk but the conversation between them proves that you feel light when you share your emotions with others. Halit's father tells Edith that he is thankful for the way she has taken care of his son during his illness. As he states "Yes, he insisted. Thank you" (Hall 124). This interaction between Edith and Halit's family shows how communication barriers lead to misinterpretations and confusion. Social isolation during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many other problems like mental stress and misunderstandings due to communication gaps.

4.2.3 Spirituality and Pandemic

Spirituality has helped people a lot during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic as it has the capability to take people out of crises. The novel *Burntcoat* is a story of

suffering and grief, it is seen that some spiritual techniques and practices have helped the characters to come out of grief and start their life all over again.

Miller's concept of spirituality in her book *The Awakened Brain* (2021) proposes that the times of crisis are an opportunity for growth. She describes challenges as a wake-up call to be prepared for the future. As she says, "It has often been times of great challenge that have brought growth opportunities" (Miller 237). She claims that it is only in tough circumstances that people progress because hardships make you stronger and more resilient. It gives you the strength to overcome your fears and be the best version of yourself for society and people around you. Edith's character in *Burntcoat* transforms through hardships in her life journey and she comes out of misery as a more powerful character as she says, "I am burnt, damaged, more resilient." (Hall 133). Edith learns from Shun; her art teacher during her trip to Germany who taught her the technique of firing the wood to make it last longer and use it to make sculptures that "Trust comes only after patience" (Hall 31). He shows Edith how wood is "improved" after "experiencing" fire, the same is the theory of life as we humans improve after suffering, we grow through hardships. It is a spiritual technique that suggests dealing with hardships and taking them as a lesson to learn from and prepare for the tests of the future.

Furthermore, Miller claims that "unconditional love, is a significant component of spirituality" (Miller 237). She suggests selfless love as a cure to all suffering and pain, as it not only strengthens you as a person but also makes you able to see beyond yourself. It helps you to find the purpose of living, the meaning of life, a goal to live for. In the novel *Burntcoat*, some examples offer the purest form of love, unconditional love. The love between a daughter and a mother, Naomi despite her unstable mental condition protects Edith from her ex-boyfriend Ali when he is furious and wants to take his revenge on Edith. Naomi tolerates his abuse but does not even allow him to see Edith, it shows the selfless love of a mother. This unconditional love not only protects Edith from the cruel world around her but also helps Naomi to get better and grow out of her pain. Naomi's unconditional love for her daughter works as a healing power for her, it gives her a purpose to live for:

Edith, while explaining her life after the pandemic, calls it her second chance, She explains how she is a different person now. She claims that "The second half of my life, everything since has been downstream, I've made different choices, tried to make

amends. I've let go of things" (Hall 124). It shows Edith has learned her lesson, her journey has made her mature enough to make the right choices and let go of things that are not important or less important. She now has the power to endure loss and suffering. She now has a purpose that is bigger than life. She is erudite in that troubles are just a steppingstone to growth and moving forward in life as she says, "We must learn loss, not as a beginner but as a ready player" (Hall 124).

Rivers Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) argues that "we become more confident and able beings when we gain the skills needed for our survival," (Forrest 2021) it is a very important part of spiritual growth as well. The development of Edith's character throughout the novel shows how she becomes more confident about her life decisions and choices after experiencing pain. Her journey purifies her and makes her strong enough to stand by her decisions. It also reflects her spiritual growth. She in the end calls "art" and "chaos" the builders of a strong foundation of a well-equipped person who is ready to fight the demons inside and outside. She declares "The clues we give ourselves that we are self-made while disowning our makers, our chaos and art" (Hall 131). After the chaos and distress, Edith realizes the importance of unconditional love and the relationships she had in her life as she says:

I want to sit with Naomi again. I want to say to Shun yes, of course, I am the wood in the fire. I have experienced, altered in nature. I am burnt, damaged, and more resilient. A life is a bead of water on the black surface, so frail, so strong, its world incredibly held (Hall 133).

Moreover, Rivers Forrest also talks about art as spiritual practice. He explains how different forms of art have helped people during their tough times and more importantly during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. He calls art a "positive outcome" from the "period of isolation" as art has played a role of a partner during the time of social distancing when people were craving for social relations. Art is one of the ways to express your true feelings to the outside world, it has a power to transmit positive energy. Art gives a sense of peace and comfort; it also has the power to connect people to divine supremacy. In the novel *Burntcoat* the main character Edith is an artist who conveys her feelings and emotion through her art. Edith as a sculptor feels blessed during the time of social isolation as she was in her art studio, Burntcoat, during the time of social distancing where she could work and communicate her feelings through

her art. As Edith says while talking about her past that “I did not really believe in anything, other than my work” this shows her strong connection with her art and it also signifies that art was her only source of comfort during the devastating time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, she claims that “I could only commit to art” it also illustrates her commitment with her work (Hall 17).

In the end, Edith's art gets recognition at the government level as well, the minister of art Sir Philip calls her and asks her to make a memorial in remembrance of those who died during the pandemic, and this also signifies that art is devoted to lowering the threshold of something dreadful. It indicates the eternal nature of art, as art stays to pass on the lesson or message to the coming generations to guide them in similar kinds of situations. It also points out the sacred nature of art as it is used to give tribute to those who are heroes and have done something remarkable. Edith, while talking about her art states that art is the only companion which stayed with her through thick and thin. Art has been her only source of well-being during the testing times of her life. Art has never left her alone in the struggles of life, it has always been a source of comfort and peace for Edith throughout her lifelong journey. The story of the novel *Burntcoat* uncovers the therapeutic relationship between art and life, as it expresses spiritual and mental needs through the works of art. As art works as a meditation.

In a nutshell, the novel *Burntcoat* (2021) is the story of a girl Edith Harkness who lives through the pandemic contemplating her life. She remembers her tough childhood days when she used to live with her mentally unstable mother, managing everything by herself at such an early stage of her life. She gets through hard times in life and learns that only suffering has the capability to make a person stronger and better. Her spiritual journey begins when she finds out the importance of "self-reliance" and "unconditional love" She figures out that you only flourish in life when you can deal with the problems all by yourself and know your worth and capabilities. Edith also realizes that selfless love is a way to achieve happiness and satisfaction as it gives you something bigger than life itself. Furthermore, Edith uses her art as a technique to cope with the difficulties of her life. Rivers Forrest in his book *Covid-19 and Humanity's Spiritual Awakening* (2021) suggests art as one of the spiritual techniques to deal with loneliness and depression, and it is also a powerful tool to overcome trauma and convey your emotions to the world outside.

4.3 Conclusion of Analysis

The novel *Burntcoat* starts with the line "Those who tell stories survive" (Hall 5). It signifies that those who tell their story of struggle and suffering to the world survive forever even if they leave this temporary world because their stories always remain alive in the memories of those who read them and seek guidance through them. *Burntcoat* (2021) is Sarah Hall's version of the Covid-19 pandemic. The transformative journey of Edith Harkness provides minute details of the travail roller coaster of individuals who survived the virus of Covid-19. It offers insights into the lives of people who lost their loved ones during this period and how painful the process was as there was no cure available, and even doctors had nothing to help people dying of the virus. The painful time when Halit was losing his life in front of Edith, but she was unable to help him expresses the helplessness of humans in times of natural calamity. Edith suffers from mental health issues amid the pandemic because of separation anxiety and social isolation. She undergoes the process of learning through her lived experiences and finally comes out to be a more mature and companionate person. Throughout her journey spiritual practices like art, meditation, connection with others, and the spiritual perspective of taking challenges as an opportunity to learn and grow for a greater purpose help in the development of the character of Edith.

Wish You Were Here (2021) is about resilience in the moment of calamity. It is the story of a young girl Diana, The Covid-19 pandemic turns out to be a transformational journey for her. Diana's trip to an island results in a life-changing journey to embrace the truth and reclaim her true self. Before going to the island Diana had a sketch of a perfect life in her mind, she had a plan for the future. When she comes back, she transforms into a different person. She no longer believes in planning life. Diana starts seeing her life from a different perspective after she comes back, she perceives the world around her with a different eye, and she realizes that life is not about living up to others' expectations. Diana learns about herself and the world around her when she is isolated, she finds the meaning of life amid chaos. She discovers herself while on the island because there she gets time to reflect upon her existence. She also acknowledges that "something has changed in me" (Picoult 262).

This research hopes to change the common viewpoint regarding crises or tough times, as the study suggests that catastrophe is not just a challenge but an opportunity to grow and transform into a better and stronger person. It is also the time to think

beyond us, and break that shell that bound us, and embrace the truth. This study talks about suffering as a journey of self-discovery which not only helps you to be stronger but also makes you able to see the world from a different perspective.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Literature has always been a great source of inspiration and knowledge. It records stories of shared human experiences. It does not only provide us with the opportunity to share and learn from others but also gives us the chance to seek guidance in times of crisis and uncertainty. Jodi Picoult and Sarah Hall are prominent American writers of the contemporary era who have recorded the struggles of people during the Covid-19 pandemic, at the same time they have shown how people have survived through the crisis. Their writings focus on people who have suffered from mental health issues. They have also focused on the impacts of loneliness and isolation on the people who have experienced the pandemic. Stories written during the time of the pandemic are mostly viewed as stories of suffering and pain. Literature, which has always been a guide and driving force throughout history as a way to document suffering, during the Covid-19 pandemic has played a powerful role by making people relate to each other and learn through the experiences of each other. Works of literature have inspired many people during the testing period of Covid-19 and have provided comfort and encouragement to those who were affected by the pandemic. There are many examples in both the selected novels where the characters seek help through the stories narrated by the survivors of the virus. Sharing their experiences with others gives them the motivation to be better at dealing with the disease as they feel that they are not alone in their struggle against the pandemic. People used to relate and connect through the stories of literature as it was the time of social isolation and social distancing, where people were forced to limit their social interactions. Social media and online platforms have been a major source of connection and support for people throughout the time of Covid-19, as people were left with no other choice but to stay connected via social networks.

In this study, the researcher has analyzed the selected works of Jodi Picoult and Sarah Hall through the theoretical framework of spirituality given by Rivers Forrest and Lisa Miller. For both these theoretical perspectives, the time of crisis is not just a time of suffering but also a moment to reflect on the purpose and meaning of this life. They claim that challenging times are an opportunity for us to see beyond ourselves. The main characters of both novels suffer from mental health issues amid the Covid-19

pandemic when isolation and loneliness leave them vulnerable during the lockdown. Their journey through the epidemic transforms their personalities into more positive and mature people. They learn through their struggles and finally conclude what real happiness is, they claim that the actual bliss is to have a meaningful life where you are meant to be yourself and do not need to pretend otherwise.

The model given by Rivers Forrest and Lisa Miller explores spirituality as one of the techniques that have helped people during the uncertain time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Forrest calls the difficult and painful times of the pandemic a "moment of awakening" which has made us think about our lives all over again and made us realize how important it is to have a purposeful life. Isolation and social distancing have forced us to believe that we cannot exist without each other. While talking about suffering and loneliness during the Covid-19 period Forrest claims that "Suffering is a sandpaper that awakens people" (Forrest 9). He states that this calamity has made us realize our "common ties" and has turned us into more empathetic and soulful beings. Forrest emphasizes the importance of human connection and how it helps to overcome difficulties. The strong connection between people gives them confidence and courage that they are not alone in this journey of suffering, and it makes the suffering less painful and difficult. Forrest also points out that this pandemic is a sign that "our age of enlightenment is just around the corner" (Forrest 12). It has transcended our fear of death and diverted our attention towards more important things like having goals and priorities in life which make life meaningful and worth living, and how important it is to be there for each other in times of need and crisis. Furthermore, Forrest also brings to light the importance of "self-sufficiency" as he claims that being able to survive through all the difficulties of life without any expectations from others gives a person enough courage to progress and flourish in life.

Lisa Miller talks about the ultimate reality of humans which she claims is their inner reality, who they really are without any pressure from the outside world. Miller argues that we all need to accept our ultimate realities as this is the only way to survive in this cruel world. Miller also stresses the importance of radical love where there are no expectations. She explains the term "awakened brain" as an opportunity to see the world around us more openly and fully without any biases and prejudice. Miller explains that with an awakened brain, we feel like home in this wide world, and it also gives us an opportunity to have strong relationships and make rational decisions.

Moreover, Miller also points out that the awakened brain helps us to maintain our mental and physical health. Miller talks about the times of crisis as an opportunity for growth, she describes challenges as a wake-up call to be prepared for the future. As she says, "It has often been times of great challenge that have brought growth opportunities" (Miller 237). She claims that it is only in tough circumstances that people progress because hardships make you stronger and more resilient.

Diana's character in *Wish You Were Here* (2021) by Jodi Picoult is a perfect example to verify all the variables of the model of spirituality given by both theorists. Diana's character transforms through the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic, she learns through her suffering and realizes the importance of human connection. Her relationship with her mother improves after her being alone on an island. The time of isolation and social distancing proves to be the time for Diana to rethink her life and make rational decisions. Diana also comes out as a more companionate, mature, and mindful person after a period of distress and suffering. Additionally, Diana finds her true happiness, which she claims is being herself and not living up to the expectations of others. The progress in Diana's character shows how spirituality helps people in challenging times as it gives them the strength to see the positive side even in tough times and to learn to be more resilient and stronger.

Edith, the main character of *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall is similar to Diana's character in *Wish You Were Here* as Edith also suffers through the Covid-19 pandemic. She undergoes mental health issues amid the period of isolation and social distancing during the pandemic. *Burntcoat* impeccably captures the journey of emotions during the height of the virus. Edith's desire for a strong human connection is the highlight of the novel, she finds that connection with her intimate relationship with Halit. Their short but deep relationship makes her understand the importance and purpose of this temporary life. Her time with Halit during his illness allows her to gain experience of how satisfactory it is to be there for others in times of need. Edith learns through her long journey of struggles that being self-sufficient is the biggest blessing of this life. It is the only way to survive in this momentary life.

Conclusively my research is also important in addressing the mental health challenges and its connection with spirituality in the Pakistani context as well. Many Pakistanis turned to religion and spiritual practices during lockdowns mosques initially closed but online religious content grew. Rise in Quran reading, prayers at home, and

renewed interest in Sufism or personal connection with God. Lockdowns and isolation affected mental health but also gave people time to reflect on life priorities, much like the characters in the novels. A cultural shift was noticed, especially among the urban youth, in terms of career goals, lifestyle, and purpose. While Jodi Picoult's *Wish You Were Here* and Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* explore spiritual transformation as a deeply personal journey shaped by isolation, grief, and altered realities, similar themes emerged within the Pakistani context during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Pakistan, this transformation was largely framed within religious and communal values, reflecting a culturally specific response to a shared global crisis.

My study also aligns with the UN SDG 3 as it includes a strong focus on mental health and emotional well-being, which became a global concern during the Covid-19 pandemic. In both novels, the protagonists go through internal crises, isolation, grief, and spiritual self-discovery, all of which reflect the psychological impacts of the pandemic. My research reveals how fiction can mirror and deepen our understanding of psychological responses to health crises, supporting SDG 3's call for mental health awareness.

In a nutshell, spirituality has helped a lot in the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has helped people to change their perspectives towards difficulties and crises. Spirituality suggests seeing the positive side of everything and learning through hardships and mistakes. The model given by both theorists claims that suffering is just an opportunity to take a break and rethink life all over again. They propose spiritual techniques to recover from pain and grief, as spirituality allows you to be self-sufficient, have a purposeful life, and be more resilient towards distress. Both novels discuss a few more practices besides spirituality to recover from crises and distress. Art is one of those techniques, Diana in *Wish You Were Here* emerges as an art therapist after her long journey of stress and pain. Similarly, Edith, the main character of *Burntcoat*, uses her art and makes a sculpture to honor the people who died during the pandemic. Likewise, in the chapter on literature review, some examples demonstrate art as one of the techniques that has been helping people in challenging times continually.

5.1 Findings and Implications of the Study

This study finds spirituality as one of the best techniques to deal with uncertain circumstances as it keeps an individual hopeful about his/her life and future. There is a

need to spread awareness and understanding about this important aspect as it can make a dramatic difference in our society and can help us to improve the quality of life together. Literature is a powerful source to inspire and motivate people who have been struggling with depression and anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic or life in general. Writers have a great tool to make a positive change in the lives of people; they can encourage and motivate people through their writings.

This research also indicates that the social connections between people are of significant importance as they relate to each other and provide mutual support to each other in times of crisis and conflict. The study finds that social isolation and loneliness during the period of Covid-19 have played a significant role in leading people to anxiety, depression, and mental health issues. The separation anxiety has made people vulnerable and suffer even more amid the pandemic.

Social media and online platforms have played a vital role in helping people to connect, share, and relate to each other in the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a major source of comfort and inspiration for many people who were struggling with depression and mental health issues. Covid-19 has made us realize how important social connections are for us to sustain sanity. It has also made us aware of the need for strong connections that can give us comfort and support during tough times in life. The virus has given us a chance to learn more about our existence and has compelled us to understand that we as humans cannot exist without each other.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has discussed spirituality as one of the techniques used for survival during the tough times of the Covid-19 pandemic. I have taken into account American novelists and theorists. There is still scope for further research in this particular field as I have mentioned a few more techniques people are using to cope with distress and crises, researchers of the future can elaborate on those points and fill in the gaps. Furthermore, future researchers can also focus on the writers and theorists of other regions to bring into light their opinions and suggestions as Covid-19 was the biggest disaster of the contemporary era and has an ever-lasting impact on the minds of people who survived through it.

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