

## **Pandemic Narratives and Social Rift: A Study of Gender, Technology, and Media Law in Lawrence Wright's Works**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper critically examines how pandemic literature, particularly Lawrence Wright's *The End of October* (2020) and *The Plague Year* (2021), serves as a cultural lens to explore the convergence of technology, gender dynamics, and media law in times of global health crises. The primary objective is to understand how literary and journalistic narratives both reflect and challenge structural inequalities exacerbated during pandemics, with special emphasis on the Indian socio-political context.

Methodologically, the study employs a close textual analysis of Wright's works, supported by interdisciplinary frameworks from feminist theory, media law, and public health discourse. It interrogates how the texts render visible the disproportionate gendered impacts of pandemics, highlight the role of digital surveillance and misinformation, and critique institutional responses shaped by patriarchal and technocratic governance.

The findings reveal that *The End of October* contrives a plausible viral outbreak that prefigures real-world events, demonstrating how fiction can pre-emptively critique institutional vulnerabilities. In contrast, *The Plague Year* offers a journalistic dissection of real events, underscoring how truth and narrative collide in shaping public understanding. Both texts collectively foreground how pandemic realities magnify pre-existing disparities—especially in access to healthcare, technological agency, and legal protections for women and marginalised communities.

The results underscore that pandemic narratives function not merely as records of crisis, but as ethical and political commentaries that demand rethinking the legal and technological infrastructures governing public life. The study concludes that reading pandemic literature through the lens of gender and law opens new avenues for equitable policy discourse in post-pandemic societies.

**Keywords: Pandemic Literature, Gender and Technology, Media Law, Lawrence Wright, COVID-19 Narratives.**

## Introduction

Pandemics have always occupied a profound place in human imagination, surfacing not only as biomedical phenomena but also as cultural events that interrogate the foundations of society. From Boccaccio's *The Decameron* to Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and Camus's *The Plague*, pandemics have been depicted as moments when the veneer of normality cracks and the hidden structures of power, inequality, and vulnerability is revealed. The COVID-19 pandemic revived this literary lineage in the twenty-first century, compelling both creative and critical engagements with the social ruptures it produced. Among contemporary writers, Lawrence Wright occupies a significant position for his dual contribution: *The End of October* (2020), a speculative novel imagining a global viral outbreak, and *The Plague Year* (2021), a nonfiction account chronicling COVID-19's trajectory.

Wright's works are not simply chronicles of contagion; they are commentaries on systemic failures, technological overreach, and the unequal distribution of vulnerability. Pandemics, as Judith Butler reminds us, expose the "precariousness of life" that is never evenly shared but always mediated by social hierarchies of gender, race, and class (Butler 25). Feminist scholarship thus provides an essential framework for understanding pandemic narratives: women's bodies often become the unacknowledged terrain on which crises are managed, whereas patriarchal and technocratic systems dictate responses in ways that intensify existing inequities. Wright's pandemic narratives, when read with this lens, demonstrate how crises intersect with questions of gender, law, and technology, generating urgent calls for justice and reform.

The objective of this paper is twofold: first, to study how Wright's fictional and nonfictional works that depicts pandemics as sites where technology, gender, and law intersect; and second, to situate these insights in the context of India, where COVID-19 magnified deep-rooted

disparities in health access, domestic labour distribution, and media freedom. Methodologically, the study employs close textual analysis, informed by feminist theory, media law scholarship, and cultural studies, to argue that pandemic literature is not merely a record of crisis but a tool of cultural critique and ethical reflection.

Pandemics have long unsettled human societies, not only as medical crises but as existential ruptures that disturb the foundations of political power, social organisation, and cultural imagination. They do not merely affect bodies; they reorder worlds. From the bubonic plague of the fourteenth century to the influenza pandemic of 1918 and the recent global catastrophe of COVID-19, each outbreak has forced human beings to reckon with vulnerability, mortality, and inequality. Unsurprisingly, pandemics have also been fertile ground for literature. Writers across centuries have used the figure of the epidemic not only to document suffering but also to interrogate social hierarchies, ethical responsibilities, and systems of governance. Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* recounted tales of survival and morality against the backdrop of the Black Death. Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* blurred the lines between documentary and fiction, offering a proto-journalistic account of London's 1665 outbreak. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* imagined a future where plague annihilates humanity, weaving loss and apocalypse into the Romantic tradition. In the twentieth century, Albert Camus's *The Plague* allegorised fascism and resistance through a narrative of contagion in Oran. Each of these texts reveals what literary theorist Priscilla Wald describes as the "outbreak narrative"—a recurring cultural script through which societies make sense of contagion and its consequences (Wald 2).

Against this long tradition, the twenty-first century presented its own literary archive of pandemics. COVID-19 not only inspired new works but also revived older narratives, which are studied in light of contemporary experience. Among those who contributed to this expanding corpus, Lawrence Wright is distinctive for producing two complementary works at

the cusp of the pandemic: the novel *The End of October* (2020), which eerily anticipated a global outbreak, and *The Plague Year* (2021), a nonfiction chronicle of COVID-19's trajectory. Wright, already established as a journalist and author of political nonfiction, became one of the rare voices to capture both the speculative imagination and factual testimony of pandemic life. His dual approach—fictional speculation and journalistic record—offers a unique vantage point from which to interrogate how crises magnify systemic inequalities and reshape the infrastructures of governance, technology, and media.

What makes Wright's works particularly relevant is their resonance with feminist critiques of crisis. Feminist theorists have long argued that disasters are unevenly experienced: social hierarchies of gender, class, caste, and race determine who bears the heaviest burdens. Judith Butler, in *Frames of War*, reminds us that vulnerability is never distributed evenly but is structured by power, making some lives more precarious and others more protected (Butler 25). Similarly, Silvia Federici has traced how women's reproductive and caregiving labour, often invisible in economic and political discourse, becomes intensified during periods of upheaval (Federici 117). The COVID-19 pandemic exemplified these insights, as women globally faced heightened caregiving responsibilities, economic marginalisation, and increased exposure to domestic violence. Pandemic literature, therefore, must be read with feminist attentiveness to silences, exclusions, and the politics of representation.

Wright's pandemic narratives, when approached from this perspective, serve not merely as stories of contagion but as cultural texts that illuminate the entanglement of gender, technology, and law. *The End of October* dramatises how governments deploy surveillance technologies and emergency laws during health crises, raising ethical questions about privacy and state power. *The Plague Year* documents real-world failures for governance, misinformation, and inequitable healthcare distribution, underscoring how law and media intersect in molding

public discourse. Taken together, the two works highlight the paradox of pandemics: while they are ostensibly biomedical events, their most enduring effects are social and political.

In the Indian context, these questions acquire particular urgency. The sudden lockdown of March 2020 displaced millions of migrant workers, many of them women carrying the double burden of caregiving and survival. The introduction of digital health surveillance systems like Aarogya Setu exposed gendered and class-based digital divides, leaving many without access to technological protections. Media freedom was restricted under sedition and defamation laws, particularly against journalists—often women—who reported on the failures of state response. These experiences underscore how pandemic governance in India reproduced and exacerbated structural inequities. Situating Wright's works against this backdrop enables a transnational reading of pandemic narratives as critiques of inequality.

Methodologically, this paper employs a close reading of Wright's *The End of October* and *The Plague Year*, drawing upon feminist theory, legal scholarship, and media studies. This study has three guiding questions: How do pandemic narratives expose the intersection of technology, gender, and media law? In what ways do Wright's texts illuminate or obscure women's experiences of crisis? How can feminist critique expand the interpretive possibilities of pandemic literature?

The objectives of this study are therefore twofold: first, to examine how Wright's pandemic writings contribute to the cultural archive of contagion literature while foregrounding issues of inequality, surveillance, and governance; and second, to situate these contributions within the lived realities of COVID-19, especially in India, where crises of labor, health, and freedom were starkly gendered. By pursuing these objectives, the paper argues that pandemic literature should be read as more than mere reflection: it is a site of critique, resistance, and ethical intervention.

Ultimately, pandemics test the limits for not only medicine but also imagination. They compel societies to confront uncomfortable truths about vulnerability, responsibility, and justice. Wright's narratives, in their interplay of fiction and fact, remind us that literature can prefigure crises, document them, and, most importantly, expose the silences that haunt them. Reading his works through a feminist lens allows us to hear those silences, making visible the burdens endured disproportionately by women and marginalised groups. In doing so, pandemic literature becomes a call not only to remember but to reimagine a more equitable world in the aftermath of a crisis.

Pandemics have never been merely biological phenomena; they are cultural events that destabilise the everyday order of life and compel societies to rethink their assumptions about morality, governance, and justice. Literature, as one of the most enduring archives of human experience, has historically taken pandemics as both subject and metaphor. Epidemic writing not only reflects collective fear but also represents the distribution of suffering across different social strata. In this sense, pandemic literature is a mirror, but it is also a magnifying glass: it both reflects reality and amplifies the hidden inequities of human societies.

The genealogy of pandemic literature is long and varied. Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353) presents the plague not just as devastation but as the context for storytelling itself: a group of Florentines depart from the Black Death and share tales that probe morality, desire, and human folly. Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), though presented as nonfiction, blurred reportage including fiction, documenting London's plague of 1665 while subtly questioning state and ecclesiastical authority. Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), one of the earliest works of post-apocalyptic fiction, used plague as a metaphor for the collapse of community and the fragility of human ambition. Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947), perhaps the most canonical modern plague novel, allegorised fascism and existential absurdity, showing how disease reveals both the cruelty and solidarity of human beings.

Literary theorist Priscilla Wald, in her influential work *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, identifies a recurring pattern in these stories, which she calls the “outbreak narrative.” According to Wald, societies repeatedly return to certain tropes—mysterious origins, exponential spread, heroic scientists, and eventual containment—because they provide a narrative structure through which the disorder of disease can be controlled (3). Yet these narratives are never neutral: they encode anxieties about race, class, gender, and nation. Who is the carrier of disease? Who is depicted as the hero? Whose lives are considered grievable, to use Butler’s term, and whose deaths are treated as expendable? These questions underscore the political dimensions of pandemic storytelling.

Feminist critics, in particular, have challenged the masculinist assumptions underlying much pandemic literature. As scholar Elaine Showalter notes, the dominant plague narratives often prioritise male experiences—doctors, scientists, priests, rulers—while marginalising or silencing the roles of women, who were historically caregivers, midwives, and mourners. However, women’s labour was central: during the 1918 influenza pandemic, for instance, it was largely women who provided domestic care, often at great personal risk, while being excluded from formal narratives of heroism. In contemporary contexts, the COVID-19 pandemic revived these patterns, with women disproportionately burdened by unpaid care work, job losses in feminised sectors, and heightened domestic violence (UN Women). A feminist reading of pandemic literature consequently asks us to notice not only what is said but also what is omitted—whose stories are considered and whose are absent.

It is within this literary and critical tradition that Wright’s contributions ought to be acknowledged. His novel *The End of October* and nonfiction account *The Plague Year* belong to the outbreak narrative but also complicate it. The fictional text anticipates a viral outbreak that destabilises global systems, dramatising governmental failures, technological overreach, and the fragility of international cooperation. The nonfiction text chronicles the lived realities

of COVID-19, from scientific discoveries to political mismanagement, creating a documentary record of the crisis. Together, they exemplify how pandemic literature functions as both speculative imagination and testimonial archive.

Wright's dual approach mirrors the duality of pandemic literature itself. On the one hand, pandemics invite allegory: disease becomes a metaphor for corruption, oppression, or existential despair. On the other hand, pandemics demand documentation: the sheer scale of human suffering requires record-keeping, testimony, and accountability. Feminist scholars argue that these two roles; allegory and testimony, are themselves gendered. Allegory, often associated with male authorship, transforms disease into abstract symbols, while testimony, frequently performed by women or marginalised writers, insists on the material realities of suffering and care. Wright's works, written from a male journalistic perspective, lean toward allegory in the novel and testimony in the nonfiction; they also leave critical gaps in gender representation—gaps that feminist critique must fill.

The mirror metaphor is particularly useful here. When society looks into the mirror of pandemic literature, it does not always see itself clearly; the image is redirected through cultural assumptions and biases. For instance, in *The End of October*, the central figure is a heroic male virologist, echoing the outbreak narrative's trope of the male saviour. Women appear only in peripheral roles, often as caregivers or victims, reproducing familiar patriarchal scripts. In contrast, *The Plague Year* includes broader accounts of ordinary people. On the contrary, gendered burdens of the pandemic—domestic violence, loss of reproductive healthcare access, women's unemployment—are not extensively examined. The mirror, in other words, reflects but also distorts. A feminist reading insists on polishing the mirror differently, adjusting the angle to capture the invisibilised realities of women and marginalised groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic itself demonstrated the stakes of such reflections. In India, media images frequently depicted male migrant workers walking long distances, but the women walking alongside them, carrying children and belongings, were often overlooked. In Western media, frontline nurses, overwhelmingly women were hailed as “heroes,” but their systemic exploitation through inadequate pay and unsafe working conditions remained underexplored. Pandemic literature that fails to acknowledge these dynamics risks reproducing the very silences that feminist critique seeks to break. Wright’s works, though valuable, must therefore be read alongside feminist testimonies, oral histories, and creative writings by women, which provide fuller mirrors of pandemic reality.

At its core, pandemic literature’s role as a cultural mirror is twofold. First, it documents how societies respond to crises, capturing the fears, hopes, and contradictions that emerge in moments of upheaval. Second, it provides ethical commentary, inviting readers to reflect on their own responsibilities and the systemic injustices that crises expose. Wright’s pandemic narratives fulfil both functions but also invite feminist supplementation. They remind us that pandemics reveal not only biological vulnerabilities but also the entrenched inequities of gender, technology, and law. The mirror they hold up reflects a fractured image, one that calls for critical assessment to make visible the silences it conceals.

When Lawrence Wright’s *The End of October* appeared in April 2020, readers were deeply moved by its uncanny resonance with the global reality unfolding around them. Written before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, the novel narrates the story of Dr. Henry Parsons, a World Health Organisation epidemiologist, who confronts a deadly viral outbreak originating from a refugee camp in Indonesia. What begins as a localized mystery soon escalates into a global catastrophe, destabilising political systems, collapsing networks, and testing the moral limits of individuals and states alike.

The novel belongs firmly within what Priscilla Wald has termed the “outbreak narrative”; a narrative structure that emphasizes the emergence of a mysterious pathogen, the exponential spread of disease, and the attempts of heroic figures to contain it (Wald 4). Like many outbreak narratives, *The End of October* foregrounds scientific expertise, geopolitics, and technological surveillance as central to crisis response. Dr. Parsons emerges as the archetypal hero-scientist, struggling not only against the virus but against political inertia, disinformation, and global fragmentation.

One of the novel’s most striking features is its prescience. Though written before COVID-19, it anticipates the vulnerabilities that became painfully visible in 2020 and 2021: governmental unpreparedness, the weaponisation of misinformation, the fragility of healthcare systems, and the ethical dilemmas of digital surveillance. In this sense, the novel operates as a form of speculative realism. As critic Matthew Kaiser notes, speculative fiction often serves as “a rehearsal for disaster” (Kaiser 56), allowing societies to test their anxieties in imaginative form. Wright’s fiction thus functions as a prefigurative text, mapping the contours of crisis before reality confirmed them.

For readers in the early months of COVID-19, the novel’s fictional epidemic felt eerily familiar: overwhelmed hospitals, panicked citizens, nationalist isolationism, and collapsing economies. These resonances illustrate literature’s capacity to anticipate social fractures, reminding us that pandemics, though unpredictable in form, expose recurring vulnerabilities in human governance and solidarity.

Central to *The End of October* is the role of technology in pandemic governance. Governments in the novel rapidly turn to digital surveillance, border control, and biometric monitoring to track the virus. These measures, while justified in the name of public health, also expand authoritarian control, raising questions about privacy and consent.

From a feminist perspective, this emphasis on surveillance demands critical scrutiny. As Shoshana Zuboff argues in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, surveillance technologies are never neutral: they are structurally located within power structures that commodify and regulate human life (Zuboff 87). In patriarchal contexts, such technologies often intensify the policing of women's bodies and mobility, particularly in relation to reproduction and sexuality. Although Wright's novel does not explicitly address these gendered dynamics, a feminist reading reveals their latent presence. For instance, refugee women in the novel, already vulnerable to displacement and exploitation, are rendered doubly invisible; first as statistical victims of disease, and second as unrepresented voices in the narrative itself.

It seems that the most glaring limitation of *The End of October* is its gendered silences. Like many outbreak narratives, the novel centers around a male protagonist; the heroic epidemiologist, while women occupy peripheral roles. Parsons's wife, Jill, and his children are depicted primarily as dependents whose vulnerability underscores his masculine responsibility. That portrays the familiar patriarchal trope in which men confront the world while women embody the domestic sphere.

Feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter have pointed out that such gendered narrative structures erase the central role of women in real pandemic contexts—as caregivers, nurses, doctors, community workers, and activists (Showalter 122). During COVID-19, women constituted the majority of frontline health workers globally, yet their contributions were often framed in overstated terms of sacrifice rather than structural labour. Wright's novel, by marginalising female agency, reproduces this cultural pattern, reinforcing the invisibility of women's work in times of crisis.

Moreover, the novel's failure to engage with gendered violence during pandemics reflects a broader silence in mainstream narratives. Lockdowns during COVID-19 saw dramatic

increases in domestic violence worldwide, so much so that UN Women called it the “shadow pandemic.” Fictional narratives that omit such realities risk perpetuating the illusion that pandemics are gender-neutral events, when in fact they intensify patriarchal control within households as well as states. A feminist reading of *The End of October* therefore exposes not only what the novel uncovers; technological overreach, institutional collapse and the forces it conceals: the lived realities of women during crises. The novel’s outbreak originates in a refugee camp, a symbolic choice that underscores the connection between disease and marginalisation. Refugees, often racialised and displaced, have historically been depicted as vectors of contagion in public imagination, reinforcing xenophobic and exclusionary policies. Wald argues that the outbreak narrative frequently stigmatises “others” as the source of disease, turning social prejudice into epidemiological metaphor (Wald 53). Wright’s novel, though sympathetic to refugees, still risks reproducing this trope by making a camp the epicentre of catastrophe.

From a feminist-postcolonial perspective, this choice highlights how pandemics disproportionately affect displaced women, who face heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and lack of healthcare. Yet in the narrative, these women remain faceless victims rather than subjects of their own stories. Their absence reinforces the masculinist orientation of the text, where global elites and male scientists dominate the stage while the marginalised serve as background.

Despite its silences, *The End of October* performs an important ethical function. By imagining a global outbreak just before COVID-19, it prepared readers to grapple with questions of responsibility, solidarity, and justice. Fiction here operates as what Martha Nussbaum calls a “laboratory of moral imagination” (Nussbaum 45), enabling readers to empathise with crises before they materialise.

For feminist readers, however, this laboratory is incomplete. The absence of women's voices means that the moral imagination remains partial, confined to patriarchal frames of heroism and governance. To expand its ethical potential, the novel should be read in conversation with feminist pandemic writings: memoirs, testimonies, and creative works by women that foreground care, labour, and resistance. Only then can fiction fully prefigure the ethical questions pandemics demand.

In sum, *The End of October* evokes the systemic vulnerabilities of modern governance in the face of viral catastrophe. It anticipates the technological, political, and institutional failures that COVID-19 would soon expose, making it a prescient contribution to pandemic literature. Yet its gendered silences and patriarchal tropes reveal the limitations of mainstream outbreak narratives.

A feminist reading insists that pandemics can never be understood without focusing women's experiences: the unpaid care work, the risks of violence, the invisibility of labour, and the unequal burdens borne within patriarchal households and institutions. By highlighting these silences, feminist critique transforms Wright's novel from a closed narrative of male heroism into an open text that demands supplementation. Fiction may prefigure crisis, but only feminist readings ensure that it prefigures justice.

If *The End of October* staged a fictional catastrophe, *The Plague Year* (2021) operates as an archive of lived reality. Lawrence Wright, known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalism, turns his attention to COVID-19, weaving together scientific explanation, political analysis, and human testimony. The book is not simply reportage; it is an attempt to document a historical moment that reshaped lives globally.

Unlike the speculative mode of *The End of October*, *The Plague Year* situates itself firmly in nonfictional ground, drawing from interviews, medical studies, and government accounts.

However, as Hayden White reminds us, historical narrative is never a transparent record but always shaped by emplotment and interpretation (White 82). Wright's narrative choices—these stories include, what events to highlight, they create a testimonial framework that both reveals and occludes aspects of pandemic life.

For feminist scholars, testimony has a particular resonance. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that testimony is not merely factual recounting but a mode of bearing witness that acknowledges trauma, absence, and the limits of representation (Felman and Laub 5). In this sense, *The Plague Year* functions as testimonial literature, seeking to witness the disorientation and suffering of COVID-19. Nevertheless, much like *The End of October*, it is marked by gendered silences. Women's voices, especially those of frontline workers, caregivers, and victims of domestic violence, appear in a minor way. The overwhelming majority of testimony reflects the perspectives of scientists, political leaders, and institutional actors—domains historically dominated by men.

Nevertheless, Wright's work is valuable for its insistence on truth despite widespread misinformation. During COVID-19, misinformation itself became a parallel pandemic, with conspiracy theories about vaccines, origins of the virus, and unscientific cures spreading rapidly. Feminist media scholars note that women, especially those from marginalised communities, were disproportionately targeted by misinformation campaigns and bore the brunt of misinformation's consequences in healthcare decisions (Banet-Weiser 74). By chronicling the collision between truth and falsehood, *The Plague Year* highlights the fragility of media law and freedom during crises. One of the central themes in both Wright's works is the role of technology in managing pandemics. Contact-tracing apps, biometric data, and digital passes were introduced worldwide as tools to monitor and contain viral spread. In theory, such technologies promised efficiency; in practice, they revealed troubling inequalities of power.

Michel Foucault's concept of *biopolitics* is especially useful here. For Foucault, modern states govern not only through laws but by regulating populations at the level of life itself—birth rates, health, death, and disease (Foucault 243). Pandemic technologies are quintessentially biopolitical, embedding surveillance into the intimate details of daily life. Feminist scholars such as Simone Browne and Ruha Benjamin have extended this critique, showing how surveillance technologies reproduce racialised and gendered biases. In patriarchal societies, women's mobility and reproductive choices often become particular targets of regulation.

India's Aarogya Setu app exemplifies this tension. Promoted as a universal solution for contact tracing, it required smartphones and internet access—resources disproportionately unavailable to women in rural and minor communities. According to GSMA's 2020 Mobile Gender Gap Report, Indian women were 20% less likely than men to own smartphones. As a result, a supposedly inclusive technological intervention reproduced exclusion, effectively erasing the most vulnerable populations from digital health infrastructures. Feminist critique exposes how such technologies, far from neutral, reinforce systemic inequities.

Legal frameworks during the pandemic further intensified these dynamics. Governments invoked emergency powers to curtail media reporting, justify surveillance, and suppress dissent. In India, journalists have been prosecuted under sedition and defamation statutes—often women—who reported on oxygen shortages or migrant labour crises. Legal scholar Anupam Chander argues that pandemics create “states of exception” where rights are used under the guise of public safety (Chander 114). Feminist legal theory warns that such exceptions are rarely temporary; they normalise patriarchal and authoritarian control, disproportionately harming women, minorities, and dissenting voices.

COVID-19 has been outlined as a “shadow pandemic” for women. While the virus itself attacked bodies indiscriminately, the social consequences were profoundly gendered. UN

Women reports showed dramatic increases in domestic violence during lockdowns, as women were trapped with abusive partners while support services were limited (“The Shadow Pandemic”). The closure of schools and childcare facilities disproportionately burdened women with unpaid care work, leading to significant exits from the labour force. McKinsey estimates that women globally lost jobs at a rate 1.8 times greater than men during the pandemic.

In Wright’s narratives, these realities appear only peripherally. *The End of October* largely sidelines women, while *The Plague Year* gestures toward family struggles without focusing on them. A feminist reading insists on foregrounding these absences. As bell hooks reminds us, patriarchy sustains itself through cultural silences, normalising women’s suffering as invisible or inevitable (hooks 37). Pandemic narratives that fail to capture the intensification of domestic burdens reproduce this invisibility.

At the same time, feminist perspectives highlight women’s agency during crises. Across India, women organised community kitchens, grassroots health campaigns, and mutual aid networks. Dalit and Adivasi women mobilised to support migrant workers, often filling gaps left by the state. These stories rarely appear in mainstream narratives, but they represent alternative pandemic literatures of resilience and solidarity. Reading Wright alongside these testimonies broadens the archive, challenging the patriarchal limits of his storytelling.

The Indian experience of COVID-19 exemplifies the intersectional dimensions of pandemic inequity. The abrupt lockdown of March 2020 displaced millions of migrant workers, many of whom were women travelling with children and belongings. Media images often captured men, but the gendered dimensions of this migration—women’s exhaustion, lack of sanitation, heightened vulnerability to assault—remained underreported. Feminist postcolonial scholars focus on the fact that caste, class, and gender intersect in India to structure pandemic

vulnerability: Dalit women, for instance, faced triple burdens of caste stigma, economic precarity, and gendered violence.

Media law during this period intensified silences. Journalists reporting critically on the state response were harassed, charged, or censored. Women journalists, such as Barkha Dutt, faced not only institutional backlash but also torrents of online abuse, exemplifying how gender intersects with media suppression. As Niharika Sharma observes, digital harassment of women journalists in India reflects the convergence of patriarchal misogyny and state hostility (Sharma 94). Wright's global accounts, when situated against this Indian context, reveal how pandemic narratives must be localised to capture intersectional injustices.

### **Findings and Implications**

Taken together, the analysis of Wright's fictional and nonfictional pandemic narratives yields several findings:

1. **Pandemics magnify inequalities:** They are never neutral events but reveal and exacerbate pre-existing gendered, racialised, and class-based disparities.
2. **Technology and media law function ambivalently:** While presented as protective, they often serve as instruments of control, disproportionately harming vulnerable populations.
3. **Mainstream narratives reproduce silences:** Pandemic narratives often prioritise male heroes and institutional actors, marginalising women's labour, suffering, and agency.
4. **Feminist critique is essential:** Without feminist readings, pandemic literature risks reproducing patriarchal assumptions rather than challenging them.
5. **Literature as ethical intervention:** Both fiction and nonfiction serve as cultural tools to reflect, critique, and potentially transform public understanding of crises.

The implications are urgent. Feminist readings demand that policymakers address the gendered burdens of pandemics, including domestic violence, unpaid labour, and access to healthcare. Media law must protect, not repress, journalists—especially women—who document truths during crises. Surveillance technologies must be designed with equity in mind, ensuring access for minor groups and respecting privacy. Finally, pandemic literature must broaden its scope to include testimonies of women, minorities, and frontline workers, thereby creating fuller cultural mirrors of crisis.

### **Conclusion: Toward Feminist Pandemic Futures**

Lawrence Wright's dual contributions—*The End of October* and *The Plague Year*—offer valuable archives of pandemic imagination and testimony. Still, their patriarchal silences underscore the need for feminist supplementation. Pandemics, as Butler reminds us, expose precariousness, but precariousness is structured by power. To confront pandemics ethically, we must foreground the lives and labourers that have historically been silenced: women caregivers, marginalised workers, survivors of violence, and grassroots organisers.

In the Indian context, these insights are especially pressing. COVID-19 revealed the fragility of infrastructures, the brutality of inequalities, and the urgency of feminist solidarity. Literature—whether speculative or documentary—can help societies reckon with these truths, but only if read critically and inclusively.

Ultimately, pandemic narratives are not only stories about disease but stories about justice. By reading Wright through a feminist lens, we transform his works from chronicles of crisis into calls for change. Literature cannot prevent pandemics, but it can help imagine responses that are more equitable, humane, and just. That is the task of feminist pandemic futures: to ensure that the stories we tell about contagion do not reproduce inequality but envision liberation.

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