

Article**Anuradha Kunda****Pandemic And Post-Apocalyptic Films****NORMAL LED TO THIS**

Said Ed Youngs. Science journalist of THE ATLANTIC.

He said: “Our current model of economic growth has led to increasing deforestation and loss of biodiversity, accelerated urbanization, intensive animal farming, global travel, all factors known to increase the risk of zoonotic viruses jumping to human hosts and spreading with alarming ease.”

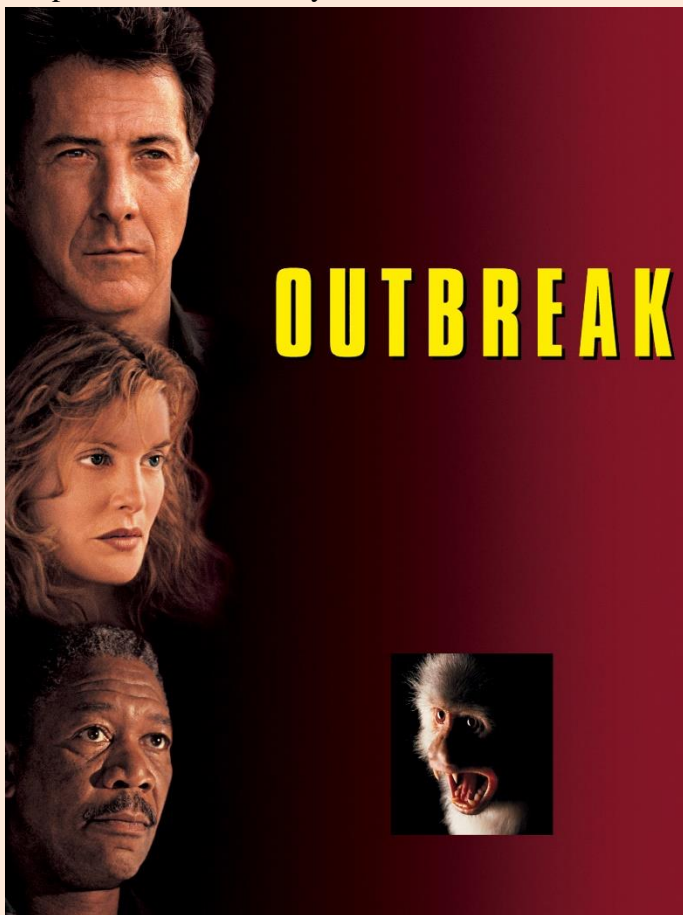
So new normal is not something abnormal and what we considered normal was not enough normal. We need something better, in the words of Christen Dorsten, there is no glory in prevention, we should avoid the return to business as usual and rethink capitalism.

Be it the one-man army of Brad Pitt in *WORLD WAR Z* or Sandra Bullock in *BIRD BOXES* or Dustin Hoffman in *OUTBREAK* and in many more pandemic films or if we may call them virus films, back to nature and food crises remain the main issue, though sometimes very obliquely screened.

Writing about pandemic films is a huge task and I am just trying to cover these two major themes, food and nature.

OUTBREAK was a 1955 film that showed that Motaba virus mutates and spreads like influenza. The film takes a time span of 28 years. And as usual, a very racial approach as the origin of the virus is Africa, the host being a white-headed capuchin monkey. In Hollywood films, the origin of the virus has to be China or Malaysia or Africa or India. In *WORLD WAR Z*, Brad Pitt says, India is a blackhole. And human concern starts when the white

men are affected. When the two army officers Mcklintok and Billy Ford are sent to Africa to investigate Motaba virus that causes deadly fever, they just destroy the camp of the infected soldiers. That is the USA way of dealing with problems. After twenty eight years, a USAMRID virologist Daniel probes into the matter with an outbreak in Zaire. By then McKlintok and Ford have become superior army officers and the secret alliance of military power and capitalism seems to win unless Jimbo, who works in an animal testing lab steals the monkey, gets infected, infects his girlfriend, infects the pet store owner Rudy Alvarez.



All the three die of infection, Jimbo, Alice and Alvarez but what comes out of this is the human modes of dominating the animal world. Animal testing laboratories. Pet stores. All these go against nature. Repeatedly the human race has done it.

Daniel's ex-wife Roberta Keough investigates into their death and Daniel joins her team along with Schuler and Salt. Somewhere separation is lost and a possible human reunion is hinted.

The monkey was released by Jimbo and the search for him continues. The town of Cedar Creek is quarantined and martial law is imposed. Both Schuler and Roberta get infected and this time Ford,

who said that the virus was destroyed twenty eight years ago comes up with an experimental serum which cures the original strain. That is how Daniel comes to the realization that the virus was not destroyed but kept as a plan to bomb Cedar Creek, to incinerate the town to prevent a global pandemic.

Operation Clean Sweep. McClintok, now a major general planned to use the operation to conceal the mutated virus' existence. The virus is a biological weapon in military hands.

So, the films had been predicting this since a long time!

That the monkey, who is called Betsy, is experimented upon, her antibodies added with Ford's serum results in an anti-serum may be the stereo typical Hollywood element but the film speaks sense. It reminds us of the warning of modern science and virology. Pandemic caused by an unknown virus is not a matter of IF but of WHEN.

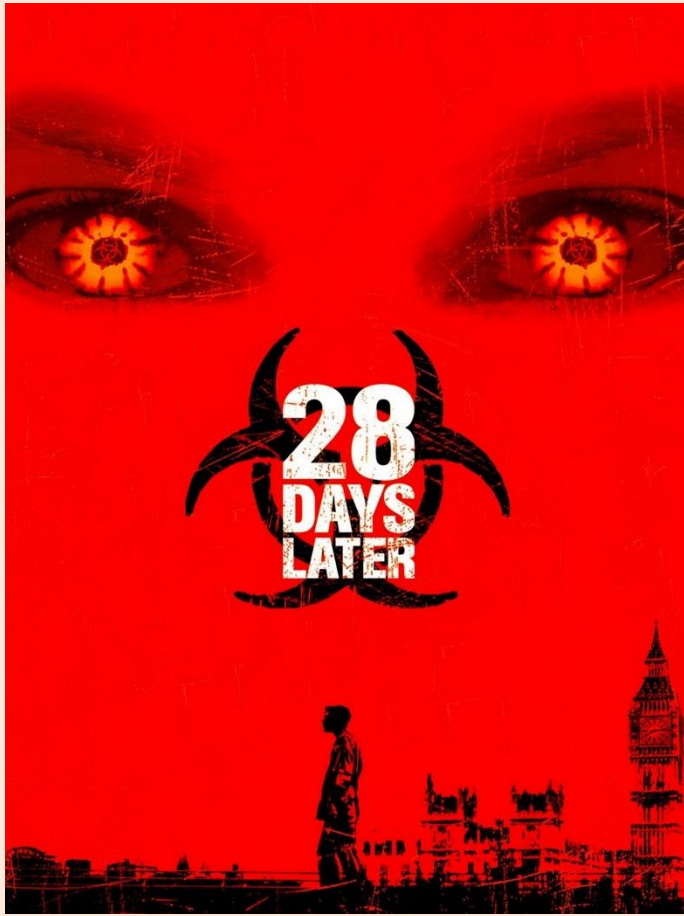
As now the WHO head Soumya Swaminathan warns the world about the continuously changing character of corona virus, Species B and its twice mutated Mutant strain, we rethink the films which have been considered fantasy so far.

The world has its humans, it has its viruses. Both are deadly.

TWENTY EIGHT DAYS LATER is one such post-apocalyptic horror drama that does not involve zombies. Directed by Danny Boyle it focuses the breakdown of society, with the accidental release of a contagious virus. Basically, it is the struggle of four people, Murphy, Harris, Burns and Gleason. Once again, the non-human sources are targeted. In a Research Facility in Cambridge, some environmental activists free the chimpanzees who are infected with highly contagious, rage inducing virus and one of the chimps bite and infects a female activist.

Twenty eight days later, it is the abandoned city of London and sights of catastrophe are seen everywhere. Unfortunately, the infected people are portrayed as monsters in these genres and they are petrol bombed. The societal collapse, London underground shelter, Manchester blockades have nothing to do with real pandemic situations. The infected people attacking the uninfected is the most

sorry side. Taken otherwise, it can be interpreted that there is violence in the very thought of the infected that the healthy people should get infected too! That is horrific but real. Sadly real. The attacks are projections of those inner thoughts!



WORLD WAR Z, made in 2013 seems fantastical, absurd as Brad Pitt alone takes the entire tough journey of fighting away the zombies and getting inside the strong room of WHO to find out a vaccine which makes human beings invisible to the zombies. Heavily gender biased, the film has only Brad Pitt to show his action skill. The wife and two girls are deposited in the safe ship, under the supervision of a small rescued boy whom the hero gives the responsibility of 'taking care of the ladies'!

However, this film takes us back to that question, if it is all about virus and vaccines, why are the zombies introduced? Do the film viewers have a fascination for the zombies, and if so, why?

It is possibly because human beings love to watch the absurd horror, something that will not touch them or affect them in reality. The zombies are the undead. They are some infected human beings who turn violent, carnivorous and infect others. They are scary because they portray death- in- life. But is

it always important to connect the zombies with pandemic films? As one watches the movies, one can get struck by the thought that the zombies act unnaturally. They eat human flesh, they bite. Their bizarre behavior metaphorically presents the one most important crisis during the pandemics and that is food. Starvation turns human beings to flesh eaters. This is far-fetched but tells one a lot about the horrible effects of starvation.

BIRD BOX.

If WORLD WAR Z rests on Brad Pitt, BIRD BOX rests entirely on Sandra Bullock and the blind folding act.

Malorie Hayes is a pregnant single woman who was brought up by the wolves, in her own words. She survives a strange pandemic in which any human being who looks at the eyes of the strange entity becomes suicidal. She takes entry in a household as she is in search of food. This house has uninfected beings and one by one they commit suicide as they encounter the strange entity.

The film has a greater range because of its human aspects. Malorie and Tom, the white woman and the non-white man share a wonderful bonding which stands against all the odds and violence.

Malorie is a fighter as she gives birth to her son and adopts the girl child of the woman whom they had given shelter.

The film has highly sensitive issues. As all the survivors die one by one, as it happens usually in post-apocalyptic movies, Tom, Melory and the kids survive. Malorie never names the kids. The boy is called Boy and the girl is called Girl. She is of course given her mother's lucky charm which her mother had given to Melory before committing a violent suicide. To this Tom objects. He asks Malorie to name the kids, in his deep romantic voice he tells them stories about flowers and butterflies and climbing trees in childhood. Malorie is horrified. She knows the reality. She knows that the children are living in a dangerous time, when they will never climb a tree or chase a butterfly. They are confined. They are blindfolded so that they do not see the entity and become suicidal. She shouts, protests and stops Tom. She says that she has done everything very consciously, so that the children

who are trained to follow sounds being blindfolded, do not get hurt, do not become frustrated.



Malorie found the birds in a cage in the supermarket. She took the birds along with her. They could have stayed in one house but visit to the supermarket or invading abandoned homes, all indicate one thing. Food crises. One by one the humans commit suicide. The birds accompany Malorie, Boy and Girl through all the rough days.

The destination finally reached is a blind school where Malorie finally removes her blindfold and blindfold of the kids. She names the girl after her deceased mother Olympia and her boy after the man who loved her, Tom. She is now mother to them, Malorie no more.

The birds. Nature. The birds chirp violently when they can sense the presence of the entities.

Kids, small children always carry an extra sentiment in all these post-apocalyptic films.

CARGO has an infant Rosie, carried by her father all throughout the film and once again there are the

zombies. The zombies live on human blood. Human flesh. If it is symbolic, it speaks in volumes.

Keeping aside the technique of using a baby to sentimentalize the issue, CARGO highlights the decay of what is called 'normal' and criticizes modern trappings of technology.

This 2017 post-apocalyptic horror film presents a world which is overtaken by a strange virus which turns people into rabid within forty-eight hours. The serene life of Andy, Kay and Baby Rosie on a houseboat in rural Australia is shattered as they are short on food. Food crises is a major pandemic issue. The abandoned boat that Andy visits is inhabited by rabids. Andy is spared but Kay gets infected. The film includes the aboriginals as the girl Thoomie attempts protecting her infected father and her mother searches her frantically. Andy is infected by a turned Kay and the school teacher Etta explains him how the aboriginal students have gone back to the old ways of living by discarding modern traps.

This is a common track in the post-apocalyptic films which try to create some kind of bizarrely horror in portraying rabids or zombies and finding the solution in going back to old ways. Taken otherwise, there is a tendency to discard a synthetic world.

When Vic traps Thoomie as it is his mission to attract the infected to kill them by imprisoning healthy human beings as baits, one can find a consumerist, imperialistic aim in it. The way to get rid of this is to surrender to nature, as the aboriginals do.

CARGO ends on that note as the magical white paint disguises human scent from the zombies. Whether they are the zombies or anything else like the vesps in THE SILENCE, the beings have some defective point by which the human beings defeat them. The zombies in WORLD WAR Z cannot see, the zombies in CARGO depend on smell, the strange entities of BIRD BOX cannot follow sound and the vesps in THE SILENCE cannot see but they do not allow sound. Any kind of sound attracts them and they destroy the source immediately.

Directed by John R. Leonetti, this 2019 film has creatures called vesps who hunt by sound and cannot tolerate cold. It was said about corona virus that they cannot survive in high temperature.

Whatever it is, this film also speaks about taking over the environment, either by human beings or by pterosaur like creatures is not good.

Have not the human beings made too much noise and sound? Thinking about growing noise pollution, it seems nature has endured too much. A cave research team excavates a mine and encounter an unknown species who attack the noisiest areas.

Ally Andrew, played by Kiernmaun Shipka has lost her hearing in a car accident. When the city is attacked by the vesps, the government asks all to stay indoors in silence.

Silence is lacking in metro cities and the vesps force human beings to go back to silence. In this time of disaster, a tongueless religious cult springs up, the Reverend needs Ally as he says that the girl is fertile! That is what religion wants and does, heavily gendered is all religion and woman is womb to fertilize the world with their cult. The small girl is sent to the family to trap them, she is a bait, with high sounding phones tied to her.

Ally finally escapes abduction and the family moves to cold zone where Ally hunts vesps with arrows. There are options. The vesps may adapt to cold. The human beings may adapt to silence. Too much talking has been done.

These films try to portray horror which fails most of the times but there are certain glimpses of pandemic situations, certain issues like food crises and isolation, certain conditions of city life that are uncongenial to human health, some metaphorical devices that motivate the viewers to rethink and re interpret.

CONTAGION made in 2011 however makes sense. One infected bat takes shelter in pig farm, infects a banana which is consumed by a pig. The pig is slaughtered by the chef of Macau Casina who shakes hands with Beth Emhoff on a business trip to Hongkong and just after two days Beth suffers a seizure back to Minneapolis.

She dies from an unknown virus. Her son Mark is dead and husband Mitch is isolated but naturally immune.

Innate immunity is very significant in case of SARS - COV2. as well!

In Atlanta, Department of Home Security Dr. Ellis Cheener in Center for Disease Control and Protection thinks that this virus is a bio - weapon.



Epidemic Intelligence Service is employed and Dr. Ellis Mears dies while investigating. Novel virus spreads, city is under quarantine, food crises haunts and along with panic there is looting, there is violence. CDC assumes that the virus is a combination of genetic material from pig and bat borne viruses.

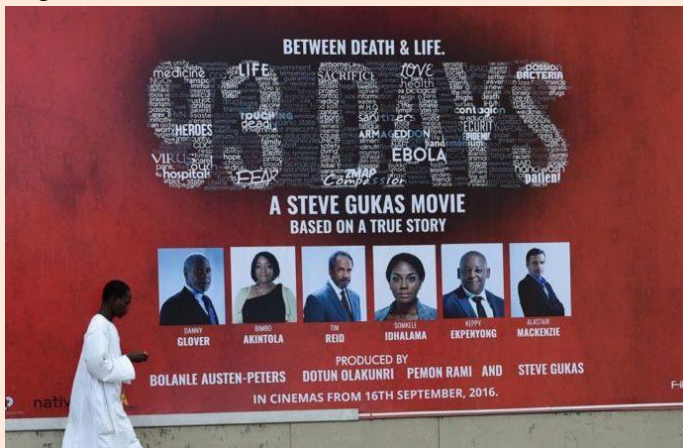
Scientists fail to invent a cell culture to grow MEV-1. The virus is too virulent and mutates fast through Respiratory droplets .

Finally, an experimental vaccine is successful but by then death toll is alarming. Vaccination is done on lottery based on birthrate.

The film foretells much, the pig bat episode is explained in flashback at the end when Beth's contacts are investigated.

The film world had predicted about fast spreading viruses that mutates and are hard to control.

93 DAYS, directed by Steve Gukas is a different kind of movie, a different genre that screens the true story of an Ebola virus patient in Nigeria in 1914.



Extremely sensitive handling of the issue enriches the film. With dialogues like, ‘Everything in Nigeria is politics, even Ebola’ or ‘New viruses will crawl out of the jungle to Nigeria’ or ‘What is the point of having infections disease facility ward if it cannot deal with infections’ are so true to life!

A Liberian - American diplomat arrives at Lagos, the, heart of air travel to West Africa with Ebola symptoms, fever and headache. The film focuses on the heavy denial of the diplomat Mr. Sawyer that he does not have Ebola and the effort of the medical team to isolate him and treat. First Consultants is a family and Dr. Stella Ameya Adedovah is religiously devoted to her work. Even the pre-dinner prayer includes the well-being of her patients.

The viewing is intense as a group of dedicated doctors and nurses work and some get infected.

Mr. Sawyer is cremated but he leaves infection. The patients are put in isolation ward which was actually a drug resistant TB unit. No proper facility is available, there is no proper power, water, sanitation. Bimbo Akintola as Dr. Adedovah

is shocked but there is no out. This is the undercurrent of medical violence in the film. The patients just lie and see each other dying. ‘Ebola made him less before it destroyed him’, that is the realization. A corpse is removed being covered in a plastic shield and the pregnant patient turns away her face. As cremation goes on, flames are reflected on the face shields of the medical workers. The song lingers, ‘My spirit is weary/ Hear my lord/ Help me make it through’.

Dr. Adedovah dies, but the young Dr. Ada is cured. On the white board there are three categories. Admitted, discharged, demised.

The motto of the doctors is finely explained in the end.

‘Nigeria looked Ebola in face and said NO. We shall not run, not hide, not fail’.

894 contacts are identified and monitored. The film is a pandemic film in truest sense. The most important issues have been addressed. Diagnosis and isolation. And yet it is not a documentary. The finest aspect of the film is the human touch.

Mr. Sawyer, desperately trying to leave the hospital, Dr. Adedova praying before the meals, in conversation with son Benkie on his birthday, asking to have a cake, the affected nurse worrying what her children would eat when she is suddenly hospitalized are shot with great care. These are the real horrors of a pandemic.

As most of the films depict violence and horror in gross images, there are few films like 93 DAYS that show the face of humanity.

Epidemic or pandemic, whatever it is called psychological horror is not greater than empathy. So, the virus films were there and are there. Just a few are taken here, that speak metaphorically. The world did not listen to them.

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