

Dropping, Prominence and Inoperative Modern Civilization: A Study on Emily St. John Mandel's Station Eleven

Nila Mitriya*

Research Scholar, Department of English, Malankara Catholic College, Kaliyakavilai, India

Abstract: This article explores the decline of civilization and how the world changed after a collapse. It makes clear what civilization was like before the flu and how it was after the flu. A deadly disease called the Georgia flu spread rapidly and quickly wiped-out millions of people. No one has come forward to develop the civilization because everyone ran to save their lives. Thus, the development of the civilization was affected. Twenty years later, the technology of the developed world is gone. Devices, materials and technologies that seemed ordinary are seen as miraculous after the collapse. It also describes how people regret the importance of technology after its demise. It took many years for civilization to develop but it can be seen that development was destroyed by the flu within a week. There are benefits and drawbacks in civilization. No matter what civilization develops, it could not save humans from an invisible disease in the end. Thus, the paper also depicts the inoperativeness of modern civilization.

Keywords: Georgia Flu, Catastrophe, Civilization, technology, Museum of Civilization.

1. Introduction

Emily St. John Mandel is a Canadian novelist and essayist. She studied from home until she was fifteen years old. That's when she started writing her diary. At the age of eighteen, she went to learn dance in "The School of Toronto Dance Theatre". Mandel worked part-time as an administrative assistant at the cancer research laboratory. In 2002, while in Montreal, she wrote her first novel, *Last Night in Montreal*. This novel captures the life of a woman, abandoned by lovers as she moves from place to place. Mandel's second novel is *The Singer's Gun*. She has shown very clearly the corruption going on in the country. The novel is unique in that it depicts the worst conditions in the country. The *Lola Quartet* is her third novel, published in 2012. It tells the story of Gavin Sasaki's search for identity and economic collapse. Mandel's fourth novel, *Station Eleven* is published in 2014. What it says is about the world that was devastated by the Georgia flu and the civilization that was destroyed by it. It is one of the most beloved novels of all time. This novel is different from the other four novels written by Mandel. In it, one can see how civilization changes beyond catastrophe. The novel won Arthur C. Clarke Award and Toronto Book Award in 2015. It is nominated for National Book Award, Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction and

PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction. The novel was translated into 33 languages. "The Glass Hotel", Mandel's fifth novel, became a favorite book of Barack Obama from the books in 2020. This novel mainly focuses on corruption and avidity. It points out in a big way how investors cheat, which mainly focuses on Ponzi scheme. Mandel loves writing about technology.

Civilization was based on the growth of society. It has been growing since the dawn of time. In that sense, one can see that technology is penetrating many things. It is no exaggeration to say that civilizations made a rare contribution to achieving such a lofty position. It can be said that the beginning of civilization was when people began to live with society. Some people deal with old fashioned civilization in today's era. An ancient civilization is observed in food, dress, rituals, religion and many other things. It often highlights the social way of life. Every day man is taking civilization on the path of development. Today's career development, scientific development, social development and lifestyle are different. There are pros and cons to this. Many items that did not exist in the past were discovered. The level of civilized development is measured by the development of agricultural progress, trades industrialization and urbanization. In addition to these basic elements, the development of civilization is also represented by combinations of various sub-elements. These include standardized measurement system, advanced transportation system, legal system, currency system, writing, specialized art, advanced scientific interpretation, metallurgy, political structure and organized religion.

2. Discussion

Mandel mentions the development of civilization in many places in her novel. The massively developed civilization was destroyed by the invisible flu within a week. The Georgia flu was started only after the death of Arthur Leander. Initially, one or two people were affected and in the end millions were dead. People were affected continuously and so everyone ran to escape from it. This shows that civilization is in the hands of humans. It's not worth it if there are no humans to handle it. In chapter six, Mandel gives an incomplete list that there are no more cities, films, Internet, transportation, countries, social

*Corresponding author: mitriya06@gmail.com

media, police, towns, pharmaceuticals, etc. “No more screens shining in the half-light as people raise their phones above the crowd to take photographs of concert stages. No more concert stages lit by candy-colored halogens, no more electronica, punk, electric guitars. No more pharmaceuticals. No more certainty of surviving a scratch on one’s hand, a cut on a finger while chopping vegetables for dinner, a dog’s bite. No more flight. No more towns glimpsed from the sky through airplane windows, points of glimmering light; no more looking down from thirty thousand feet and imagining the lives lit up by those lights at that moment.” (31)

Disaster time measurement system changes at Severn City Airport. After the decline, Dates are first measured in days and then in years. “Day One, Day Two, Day Forty-eight, Day Ninety, any expectation of a return to normalcy long gone by now, then Year One, Year Two, Year Three. Time had been reset by catastrophe.” (231). Mandel mentioned that this is difficult to explain to the younger generation. She says a positive thing that is, but in all honest, the whole history of getting stuck in airports will eventually become a history of boarding and flying away. By this Mandel is saying a positive thing that one day the world will change. This shows that man has to live a difficult life without technology because he has sought civilization for every need.

Mandel explains in more detail what civilization is, rather than what she said about the fall of civilization through this novel. She has divided the rise and fall of civilization into two types. During the scientific development, many people became addicted to things like cell phones, women forgot to work because of the household appliances, yet many birds and trees were affected by radiation. These are the disadvantages of growth of technology. At the end of the decade in the airport, Clark Feels himself as a lucky one, because he saw that one world was going to perish and another was about to begin. He thought it was a blessing to see and remember civilization.

“And not just to have seen they remembered splendours of the former world, the space shuttles and the electrical grid and the amplified guitars, the computers that could be held in the palm of a hand and the high-speed trains between cities, but to have lived among those wonders for so long.” (231,232)

On Day Two, the signal was not available on everyone’s phone, so no one could make a call to their families or friends. They are in frustration. “God, why won’t our work? I so wish I could tweet this.” (242) No one has been without a cell phone and internet before the collapse because everyone gave much importance to it. On the third day of the new world, all the snacks in the vending machines were empty. The battery ran out in the video game that Elizabeth’s son Tyler was playing. There is no current anywhere to charge.

The effects of the end of the civilization are felt in different forms: the difficulty of getting medicine, food and water. There is difficulty in reaching medical attention through 911 calls. Television broadcasters did not say for sure that this was the end of the world but the term apocalypse began to appear. Max paid for the robbed food to relieve the conscience of the airport residents even though the currency was no longer worth it. On Day Four, they burned newspapers and magazines to lit fire on

the tarmac. They believed that if any helicopter or plane went up in the sky it could see the blazing fire and come down to save them. Even all this had happened they were still hopeful but there was not even a glimmer of light in the sky. On Day five somewhere broke the shops because a lot of people don’t have clean clothes. All can go anywhere, do anything, take anything because no one is going to ask. On Day Sixth there was no food, snacks or sweets in the store. People took everything and ate to fill their stomach. Still, the National Guard had not reached. From here one can understand that the Georgia flu is effective. On day Seven, the TV network was not available. Soon all light was cut off. There is no one to operate the generators. Without television, it would be impossible to see what was going on outside the world. On Day Eight, none of the new people come to the airport. “By Day Eight no one new had come to the airport and no one who’d left had returned, no more planes or helicopters had landed, everyone was hungry and trying not to think about all the apocalypse movies they had seen over the years”(244)

Clark’s dexterity to walk through the security checkpoints three or four times shows how panic and breakdown the world has changed in a few hours. Elizabeth is expressing her beliefs here, standing firm in the faith, and certainly says that civilization will not collapse. None of the airline staffs was there. Getting enough food was very difficult. The news came that the airport was going to close soon. “For public health reasons, the airport was closing immediately.” (236)

Although it is difficult to interpret to the future generation what is civilization was like before the flu, Clark considers he has to inculcate memories and experiences of the world through his Museum of Civilization. After the collapse, the interconnectedness of modernity and technology seems like a miracle. Clark did not know how the flu spread so quickly, but paradoxically the means of transmission were civilized and the planes interconnected, however, fortunately, his plane did not carry the affected passengers.

Clark wonders what Robert, his friend, would have done if he had during this time. “If Robert were here- Christ, if only- if Robert were here, he’d probably fill the shelves with artifacts and start an impromptu museum.” (254) At this time Clark decided to collect absolute objects and created a museum in advance. At first, he put his damaged iPhone on the shelf. Next, he kept an Amex card which was left by Max and the driving license of Lily Patterson. He stacked all these artifacts in a separate row. Then he started collecting large items like laptops, computers etc. Thus, he begins the Museum of civilization. By visualizing an ice globe, he considers how many human hands are needed to design and produce. Clark remembered how hard man had worked to create it when he looked at each object.

In Station Eleven the reader repeatedly finds objects treated similarly. The novel is scattered with instances of now useless objects-passports, mobile phones, credit cards, computers, even a paperweight-that have become aesthetic links to the past (Leggatt 8). Before the collapse, it was difficult to see the stars in the night sky in the city because the sky was obscured by light pollution, but was able to see the stars after the collapse. All the work that was normal and could be done very quickly

was considered miraculous after the breakdown. People were addicted to the internet when it was there but after the collapse, the benefits of it too were gone. If there was an internet facility, one could call one's relatives and inquire about their situation and could see current affairs of the country because all the facilities were on the Internet. "All of the information in the world is on the Internet, and the Internet is all around you, drifting through the air like pollen on a summer breeze." (202)

The livelihood that used to be easy is now hard for everyone. "*what was lost in the collapse*: almost everything, almost everyone, but there is still such beauty." (57). "Beauty, in other words, emerges when things are weaned from the forms of life that used to organize their production, circulation, and consumption, and enter novel entanglements of life forms and forms of life." (Vermeulen 18)

What has been most affected by this decline is medicine. Man can live without technology but cannot live without a soul. Everyone relies on doctors when that soul is in danger, but that medicine does not even exist now. The hospital was closed within a week of the outbreak. It has been closed for twenty years and was still not opened. Nowhere is it mentioned that there was a hospital after the collapse. Jeevan only helped those who relied on him because he is a paramedic but no hospital was set up anywhere. Thus, there is no medication to cure any disease.

Everyone went to the Museum of Civilization if they want to see the Civilization because civilization was only thereafter the destruction. Some people were relieved when seeing it. The sense that civilization is what man is looking for is expressed through this. The only one who is connected with civilization can search it fully.

In "Station Eleven Themes: Civilization" Jacob Ginsberg says, "The novel makes clear that a part of the reason people takes the privileges of Civilization for granted is our inability, or perhaps refusal, to see just how fragile civilization is. For instance, at one point Mandel traces the design, production and shipping of one product that passes through countless human hands on the way to the consumer." In a sense, one can see civilization is built on connections. There are many developments in technology with the help of other countries. The George flu spread so fast and destroyed everyone as civilization advanced and became connected. The first reason the disease spread was by air travel. Without the plane, the fellow passengers would not have been affected and would not have spread elsewhere. The catastrophe was greatly spread only

by technological advancement. Although civilization was created by humans, humans have not been able to save it because they finally ran to save their lives. And it is nonsense to believe that Civilization will save humans. Civilization cannot bring man alive even if it is at its peak. The invisible flu has destroyed the whole technology of the country and no scientific or medical development has been able to save it. None of the National Guard or Military force came to save humans, thus making civilization grew was meaningless.

At the end of the novel, Kirsten saw an electric light in the town through the telescope. Thus, it can be said that civilization began to grow again after the disaster. Mandel concludes the novel with a positive note. There are many reasons for Civilization to grow. Civilization thrives only because human does not have enough needs to live.

3. Conclusion

Half of the novel is about the impact of civilization and gives the detailed description of the suffering of the human beings. The epidemic seemed to put an end to the world and the lives of the people. Everything has stopped as a result of the diseases. Importantly the civilization was thus affected. This recounts the stories of the fall of civilization and how the world is changing after the collapse. It clarifies how the flu spread through the development of civilization. It hosts about the advantages and disadvantages of technology. It took twenty years for the Georgia flu to be completely eradicated. When comparing the old years to the years after the collapse, old years considered beautiful. Technology was booming in the pre-disaster period but the development of technology has been slow since the catastrophe. Station Eleven reveals how the world changes in an instant. It makes sense that nothing is permanent in life because everything is temporary. The world could end at any moment.

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