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Resilient coexistence model: Exploring the selfpreservation strategy of hessean character goldmund

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Abstract

Crisis moments such as pandemic situation tests individualism and highlight the value of collaboration and the interconnectedness of local, national, regional, and global societies. Nothing exists in a vacuum. All living things are interrelated and comprise a network of connections, including flora and wildlife. Herman Hesse describes a pandemic situation in his novel Narcissus and Goldmund where the self-preservation strategies of the protagonist, Goldmund lead to sustainable living. This study utilising the descriptive-analytical method interrogates the self-preservation strategy of Goldmund that leads to sustainable living. This study comes with the Resilient Coexistence Model of self-preservation that calls for a post-pandemic global vision of interconnected self-preservation leading to sustainable living, a journey towards the future, leaving rigid egoistic boundaries, where the future is Mother Nature.

Keywords: Post-pandemic, resilience, interconnectedness, sustainable living, coexistence

Introduction

History is a great teacher who has witnessed different pandemic situations, world wars and holocaust experiences. Each Pandemic offers lessons aplenty. The pandemic situations are global situations that reveal how much technology and free market economy have made people across the globe a community that comes up with new forms of uncertainty and anxiety [1]. Local is no more local but global. Sanjay Bhattacharya, an Indian diplomat who is serving as the ambassador of India to Turkey writes, "The ways and means by which people are coping with the pandemic would be based on the quality and resilience of their social and psychological framework" [2]. A calamity that has been brewing since the latter part of the 20th century and persisting into the present has now come to light because of the COVID-19 epidemic. The crisis periods are not new to human history and each crisis comes with a lesson to learn and unlearn and the recent pandemic situation was not an exception. However, the scratches which the pandemic created in the different spheres of life will remain forever. The expression 'new normal' means that normal life after the entry of coronavirus will be normal with a difference.

Slavoj Žižek states that there can be no return to normal; instead, a 'new normal' must be built on the rubble of the previous existences, or risk of falling victim to a new barbarism, the beginnings of which are now obvious ^[3]. The shifts in the different dimensions of life are unpredictable and unprecedented. The devastation that faces is not limited to economics; it also encompasses ethics, a refusal to see diversity as the fundamental tenet of life, and a genuine alignment with the ideals of globalization, wherein all people on the planet are treated equally ^[4]. The times of crisis cast a challenge on individualism and emphasize the necessity of group efforts as well as the connectivity of local, national, regional, and global communities ^[5, 6].

According to Walther's study, individual contentment is a social construct rather than a solitary phenomenon. Four principles-change, connection, continuity, and complementarity-have an impact on both the individual and the communal domains. One cannot exist in isolation from the other. To assist individuals everywhere realize their potential, aid must be designed and implemented to offer comprehensive support that not only attends to each dimension but also helps to optimize how they interact with one another. The four pillars of existence (Soul, heart, intellect, and body) and their interplay determine how one experiences the world around, them and what one does in response to that experience, and connect human

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Research Scholar, Department of English, Karunya Institute of Technology and Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, beings through time and boundaries, generations, and socioeconomic conditions regardless of who one is or where onecome from ^[7]. Thus, life on this planet forms part of a great chain of being. Nothing is an isolated entity. Each flora and fauna form part of a network of relationships and everything is interconnected.

Over the years, interest in the concept of resilience has varied and grown in various academic domains. Resilience can be understood as the capacity to absorb shocks and continue operating mostly in the same fashion. It quantifies the change an ecosystem, company, or society can withstand before reaching a tipping point when it enters a condition it then tends to remain in. For Folke, resilience "deals with complex adaptive system dynamics and true uncertainty and how to learn to live with change and make use of it" [8]. Walker defines resilience as "the ability to adapt and change, to reorganize, while coping with disturbance. It is all about changing in order not to be changed" [9]. One of the reasons is the general concern over the discernible rise in dangers from pandemics, terrorism, natural and technological disasters, political unrest, and terror around the globe [10]. Studies are conducted on resilience in the context of economics and business [11], health systems [12, 13], psychology and psychopathology [14], supply chain management systems [15], and genetics, molecular biology [16, 17]

Folke's study viewing resilience as a subset of sustainability, places a significant emphasis on intricately interwoven, highly adaptable social-ecological systems made up of individuals, groups, economies, civilizations, and cultures that interact with ecosystems as components of the biosphere on both temporal and spatial dimensions [8]. When a society encounters a pandemic, its identity and culture evolve. In addition to uniting people and encouraging a spirit of fortitude, a crisis can also cause individuals to become mistrustful of one another and selfcentred [18]. Herman Hesse describes a pandemic situation in his novel Narcissus and Goldmund where the selfpreservation strategies of the protagonist, Goldmund open doors to Resilient Coexistence Model of self-preservation. This study utilising the descriptive-analytical method interrogates the self-preservation strategy of Goldmund that leads to sustainable living.

Resilient Coexistence Model of Self-preservation

In the novel Narcissus and Goldmund, Hesse has crafted his character Goldmund as a wayfarer who survives the pandemic situation of the Black Death. This is narrated in chapters XIII and XIV. The wayfarer is not led by sophisticated capitalistic desires but by the instinctively natural urges of one's stomach. If the basic needs are met then he is happy. The wayfarer is not worried about possessions and private property. The wayfarer, Goldmund is accompanied by a pilgrim, Robert in the novel. They were not restricted by anybody on their way. Goldmund as a wayfarer has covered many villages and met many people and the experiences were very pleasant. The pandemic situation makes people less hospitable in the novel. The celebrated concepts of society and relationships change into egoistic protection of oneself. When they were entering a village, they were confronted by a group of peasants armed with cudgels, poles and flails. They were worried about their security and the fear of the plague made the peasants violent and egoistic. Their only concern is to protect their village

from strangers ^[19]. The community degenerates into a crowd of self-centred individuals. Basic survival instinct takes over and altruism vanishes. Even the enquiry into their wellbeing is considered to be a crime that can invite Stone to death. Fear of death rules the people in the pandemic situation. Though the inevitability of death is commonplace, known to people even in their normal mortal life, when faced with epidemic situations death becomes 'larger than life', altogether strange. The so-familiar, expected death all of a sudden turns to be unfamiliar.

In the true spirit of a wayfarer, Goldmund is like a child and greedily follows the dictates of his poor stomach governed by a few simple urges and needs. That's why even after understanding that the village was affected by the plague so severely; Goldmund is trying to lead a life in the midst of it. Instead of cursing the situation Goldmund is very practical and trying to lead his life even through the pandemic situation. When he entered a heavily fortified town saw a pretty girl beside an upper window. He insisted her to come with him. This approach towards life reminds me of the Epicurean 'Carpe diem' which means 'seize the day'. In its origin, it refers to the plucking of the fruits. Since the fruits are ready to pluck why wait for them? [20]. Thus, the usage is translated also as to pluck your day and trust in the future as little as possible. It calls for the enjoyment of the present moment since there is no certainty about the future. However, it is not a notion that veers to a hopeless situation. More than bewailing the desperation of a hopeless future, this is about utilizing the present moment. The response of Lena, the girl of town is positive and moves with Goldmund. She finds everything dreadful in town and is urged to go far away outside the town. Once they are out of the town, they are happy and Lena is very glad to see the sky, trees and meadows again.

They move to a forest away from the dreadful town. Though they do not have a protected and locked house to stay in, they are happy in the forest with Mother Nature. What makes Lena unhappy is the temporality of her happiness. At this point, Goldmund is very optimistic and practical. Goldmund strengthens Lena reminding her that she is the daughter of a farmer who always looks far ahead and he continues to state that this pandemic situation is not forever. He considers this as a passing state of life and soon everything will be in order. Since it is summer and pleasant in the forest, he is advocating for Lena to be happy and at peace. In the novel, Lena later surrenders herself to death but Goldmund is moving forward. He is not struck anywhere. He does not possess anything permanently. For him, everything is on the way. He considers everything as part of his journey towards Primal Mother.

The way of life of Goldmund, in the pandemic situation, is not an egoist bent on self-preservation, but he is concerned with others too. Though the curiosity of a child as well as instinctual nature governs him, others are not excluded from his life. The episode with his companion Robert reveals that Goldmund's approach was not distancing but staying together. The death of five people inside the house due to the plague is depicted as the inexorable work of death. Here the graveyard and house are the same [19]. The concept of the house as well-protected and locked private property is giving way to the unprotected and unlocked concept of daylight. The border between the house and the graveyard is blurred. Security of the walls of the house is no more. For Goldmund, death is going back to one's source, the mother.

Since death is a universal mother's calling to the source, he is willing to embrace his agonising death [21]. When compared to the egoistic and exclusive behaviour of town and village inmates he was making himself and others who come to his company safe and happy. When the well-knit social structure and relationship fail, they blame each other as the cause of the pandemic. The narrator describes the worst thing that happened was not the death but the attitude of the people blaming each other and finding each other as hell. They are trying to find a scapegoat for the unbearable misery that they are undergoing. They are not ready to accept the pandemic situation. They consider others as villains and tag them as evil originators who are responsible for the plague- a kind of egotistic self-preservation without any consideration for the other.

Goldmund's approach to the pandemic situation collates with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's understanding of human nature. For Rousseau, all human beings have a basic drive for self-preservation. This is a result of underlying feelings, and self-preservation manifests itself in both a concern for our position in relation to other people and a drive to take care of our requirements [22]. For Goldmund as a wayfarer, his primary concern is self-preservation which takes all alongside the togetherness of others. He is creating a new family of strangers. The self-love of Goldmund does not avoid others rather; he completes himself in a relational web of others such as Robert, Lena and Rebekka, the Jewish girl whom he saves. Thus, Goldmund is not leading into any endemic conflict with his fellows. He is forming a new relationship or enunciating a family bonding for survival in a pandemic situation.

Even when the companion of Goldmund, Robert, understands that the village is affected by the plague and all these deaths are the toll of the plague, he opts for distancing. There emerges a conflict between staying together and staying socially distanced. Robert is so much worried and argues for distancing whereas Goldmund advocates for staying together to overcome these pandemic situations. He is aware that all share the same danger irrespective of differences. The solution he finds is to stay together or escape this cursed plague, together. The conundrum of 'flight or fight' is settled by him in togetherness. This is a wake-up call to an Epiphany, a new Enlightenment. This Enlightenment does not project humankind as the crown of creation but calls for interdependent co-existence. This goes beyond humanitarian considerations and demands a revelation on the existence of human beings as sons and daughters of Mother Nature.

Goldmund's self-preservation is being in resilient coexistence as shown in Fig. 1 below. Though each circle has its own borders and uniqueness, each circle exists in collective. No cell is an isolated entity but in interconnectedness. In the same way interconnects his life for survival. Even in the pandemic, he is not having an isolated existence. At the beginning of the journey Narcissus, his counterpart in the novel is physically present and at the time of the pandemic inside him, the connection lies. The ultimate goal of his journey, Primal Mother also is always connected to him. His relations with other living and non-living are that of interconnectedness. It can be called strategical because this interconnectedness is for a goal, self-preservation. From the point of view of Goldmund, it is for his self-preservation and from the perspective of others, it is their way of preserving themselves. Thus, this Resilient Coexistence Model of Selfpresentation is not egoistic, instead, the preservation of all those who are interconnected.

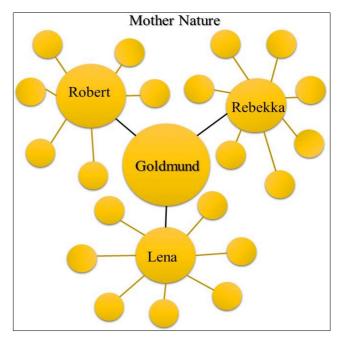


Fig 1: Resilient Coexistence Model

The character Goldmund as portrayed in the novels, especially as narrated in the context of the Black Death provides insights to read between the lines and resonate with the interdependent living. Hesse presents Goldmund in such a way he is in heart an artist who realizes the beauty of the forest and the creatures of God. In the novel, Goldmund is in constant movement. He is in search of the memory of his mother. This memory of his mother lets him go beyond the individual mother to the Primal Mother of humankind. While others consider death as a warrior, a judge or an executioner, Goldmund considers death as a mother and lover. For him, death's call is a call of love and its touch is a shiver of love [19]. This philosophy of a wayfarer is his strength even amid a dreaded pandemic. This is not a hypocritical approach to escape from the problems but an internal freedom and holistic approach that makes one courageous enough to move on. Goldmund's selfpreservation provides a Resilient Coexistence Model of Self-preservation where every life is preserved through interconnectedness. This Resilient Coexistence Model is individual and collective at the same time. On the individual level, each one preserves one's life and on the collective level, this contributes to the preservation of the life of the other.

When COVID 19 is read in the larger context of disasters that occurred via human intervention, we understand the gravity as well as the uncanny similarity of the situations can be found. Nobel Peace Prize winner Rajendra Pachauri in this interview published in "Planet Hot-Spot", (UNESCO Courier devoted to the International Year) calls for a changed lifestyle in the context of climate changes. He says, "We must also realize the danger of treating Mother Nature with disrespect and of damaging the earth's ecosystems and natural resources. We could then find ways to minimize our footprint on the Earth's natural resources and ecosystems" [23]. This is a wake-up call to make this world a better place for sustainable and enriching living. Sustainable living is a

necessary in today's context where the global community owes it an abiding universal responsibility. The imbalanced lifestyle based on human greed and its irreparable consequences can only be checked by interdependence. This imbalanced lifestyle is the result of egoistic self-preservation. Alternative to this is the Resilient Coexistence Model of Self-preservation through interconnectedness. It is perhaps the way to solve the problems of unequal distribution of wealth, growing corruption in public life and ruthless exploitation of natural resources. It is a lighthouse for us in our journey towards freedom, peace and universal brotherhood [24].

These preferences should be as the situation demands not based on one's likes or dislikes. The pandemic situation is an emergency call for effective environmental policies [25]. These are not mere ideological jargon to be read and forgotten, but real existential concerns to be taken care of and lived. The question here is as vital as in Shakespeare's Hamlet where Prince Hamlet states in an anguished moment when thoughts of self-annihilation tempted him in the face of outrageous misfortunes, 'To be or not to be that is the question'. This is an existential question and concern. One cannot be neutral in the face of such a question. The choice is between 'to be' or 'not to be'. One cannot escape from taking sides at this moment. This 'be' is not the being or well-being of a few, but the well-being of the whole, because of the unavoidable interconnectedness which is the philosophy of Resilient Coexistence model of selfpreservation.

Humanitarian language does not depict actual suffering or make it obvious what actual anguish individuals experience. It never offers a direct window onto the suffering of the far other; rather, it serves as a kind of mirror, evoking sentiments and ideas in and about the viewer symbolically, paradoxical amusement, irony, and alienation. By contrasting opposing interpretations and semiotic modes, these writings force the reader to reflect on her situation and place and, if required, take appropriate action ^[26]. In the narrative, Goldmund is presented with paradoxical playfulness, irony and estrangement. Thus, rather than forcing us to ignore real pain, the character encourages us to consider and perhaps even take action regarding our circumstances. Human nature and culture are interconnected in such a way one affects the other in a circular motion.

It is true that a change of lifestyle, a change of way of life, does not happen all of a sudden as culture does not evolve overnight. The orientation of change should be towards a nature-based culture. Mother Nature is the core of sustainable living instead of human nature. It is more ecocentric than anthropocentric. It is not a going back in evolution but a 'homecoming' in evolution. The postpandemic perspective of homecoming is not an option but an existential emergency. Overconfidence in 'unrealistic optimism' could be dangerous [27]. It is time to make use of the scientific instruments now at our disposal to better the relationship between humans and nature, encourage dialogue, and assist in steering the current course of events in the direction of a more advanced and sustainable future. The ultimate objective is to get to the ideal Happiness, which is appealing, productive, and ecologically sound. It also maintains a beneficial partnership between achieving the goal of true prosperity and happiness while separating imbalanced consumerism from happiness [28]. Imbalanced consumerism and sustainable living cannot go hand in hand.

Resilient Coexistence Model of Self-preservation derived from Hermann Hesse's protagonist calls for sustainable living. Here, the preservation of the other is a necessity of self-preservation since self-preservation happens in the web of interconnectedness. This interconnectedness is strategic since it is with a gain, self-preservation. Here, self-preservation is not egoist but interdependent. In the Resilient Coexistence Model of self-preservation, the borders are thin but necessary to indicate interconnectedness in a respectful distance. Borders show the individual nature and interconnectedness shows the collective nature. This model of self-preservation highlights the illusive nature of permanency just because the bordered concept of society changes along the perspective change on relationships. This is staying together at a respectable distance.

Conclusion

Resilient Coexistence Model of Self-preservation challenges to redefine the concept of egoistic self-preservation by redefining the traditional concepts of gender, class, caste and race. What matters is the interdependency of coexistence where one is conditioned as well as preserved by the other. Each crisis situation levels the boundaries of gender, class, caste, creed and race. Globalization have to be focused not only on a liberal economy but on liberal mental borders that break the inward-looking nationalism and racial sentimentalism. This model of global vision interconnected self-preservation calls for sustainable living, a journey towards the future, leaving rigid egoistic boundaries, where the future is Mother Nature. When Mother Nature is in and out, it is easy to flow in interconnectedness and universal fraternity. What is needed is action-oriented realism. Though it is symbolically presented through the character Goldmund, it is the need of the hour to come to such a upheaval. The Resilient Coexistence Model of self-preservation provides a philosophy of self-preservation, that calls for a holistic way of life towards Mother Nature preserving self in connectedness without greed.

Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflicts of interest of declare.

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