

The Re-membering and Re-awakening of Pan in a Post-Pandemic World

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Abstract

The word “pandemic”, deriving from the Greek word “pandemic”, meaning all people, refers to an uncontrollable force, novel to human knowledge, unleashed by unknown entities in pursuance of the physical and mental health of the growing human population. As Jungian theorists like Mary Wood have stated, a pandemic, symbolised by an invisible virus, a humanoid, refers to an organism's hybrid and everchanging structure that is suddenly set on challenging all norms placed intact by and for a complete human society. Pan, the ancient Greek God, also called the ugliest of the Olympian deities, part God and human, as a symbol of human and nature-mingled consciousness, ruled much of the prehistorical structures of art and culture, which was then replaced by the Western modernity with a single Apollonian consciousness and knowledge system (James Hillman). However, with the sudden introduction of such crisis-ridden times, the god theorists like Hillman, presumed to be dead, have been reckoned to challenge the alter ego of the pandemic, symbolised by “massive misinformation”. Rising from the ashes of a looming pandemic, spearheading a cultural movement as such, invoking the spirit of transdisciplinarity, we have the Greek god Pan, the spirit of interconnectivity and complexity riding and imbuing the ecological world with a sense of urgency, harking on a consciousness that bridges the defects of a monolithic culture, thereby embracing the marginal, indigenous forms of knowledge. This paper intends to throw light on the intricacies of a post-pandemic world as re-remembering and invoking knowledge, which is pan-induced knowledge in a manner which tends to replace multidisciplinary with transdisciplinarity.

Keywords: Jungian Studies, Post-Pandemic literature, Transdisciplinary Approach, Myth

Upon the pandemic's onset, everything thought to have been set in stone has been subject to erasure upon the changing of thoughts and ideas alike with the large-scale questioning of the Western mode of thinking, which has been previously conceived as a sure sign of modernity. However, what hangs like a shadow is the condition of people's cultural preferences, which has undergone a massive shift due to reasons impacted by Covid 19. According to theorists like Wendy Doniger, it takes a mythical analysis to study such a condition as that introduced by a humanoid, part human and part animal. It is part of human nature due to its parasitic existence, which calls into question the larger propagandist idea of “man becoming a world in itself”. With the advent of modernity, marked by a consciousness which has been explained by Jung as “all the gods have become diseases”, the internal and external man falling at odds with each other has created deep-seated friction between man and nature resulting in the former tending to the latter for one's selfish purposes.

These polytheistic deities, stand-ins for each aspect of Nature and nature, have become incorporated into our psyches where the repression of each has resulted in specific pathological and psychological conditions; for e.g., the repression of Dionysus results in schizophrenia. Towards the end of the 20th century, several focused studies on depth psychology resulted in the sudden remembering of the old gods who once ruled the psyche. However, such an ongoing project has shifted its weight to literature, which revolves around the sole axis of Apollonian dichotomies. Depth psychology intends to question this approach, especially in the light of the pandemic. The word ‘pandemic’ having derived from the Greek word ‘pandemic’ meaning “all people” or “all demons”, points to a collective reaction to any specific event or incident, which in this case is the large-scale spreading of the coronavirus.

With the moorings of enlightenment followed by the ideals of modernism, man has been in a constant state of amnesia, where the thought of man being “western, modern, secular, civilised and sane was celebrated over the primitive, archaic, mythical, magical and mad” (7) status of man, the savage being. Psychology, especially depth psychology, threw light on these aspects, initiating a certain séance to bring back, to reckon the gods, the most popular being Pan, the goat-footed god. The pandemic initiated such a séance, offering an oracular reflective space wherein each of us who delved into our respective unconscious rose with tangled hair and renewed vigour.

Pan, the Greek god born to Hermes and a nymph Diopé, is regarded as the ugliest of the Greek gods, upon the birth of whom, his mother fled in horror from a simple glance at the baby. The hairy, hooved appearance is one of Pan's constants from childhood and has remained throughout his life. Resting his properties on the phallus-driven goat nature, he is unpredictable, mobile, and ambiguous to the core. Moreover, his internal self is entirely in terms of the external self, often hinting at the god having attained fullness at birth. Upon his being taken to Mount Olympus, all the resident gods took a liking to the baby, which made him their favourite, especially Dionysus.

He who ruled Nature, Pan lived in the woodlands, hideouts, caverns and caves. He is the only god for whom temples were not built; offerings were presented in caves devoted to him. Popularly known as the god who resides in Arcadia, an ancient Greek pastoral land, it is a geographical place and a psychic space deep inside the dark recesses of the human mind. As Hillman says, “his original place, Arcadia, is both a physical and a psychic location. The "caves obscure" where he could be encountered (The Orphic Hymn to Pan) were expanded upon by the Neoplatonists as the material recesses where impulse resides, the dark holes of the psyche whence desire and panic arise” (23).

The name Pan, deriving from the Greek word meaning “all,” refers to this “all-ness,” which provides a sense of interconnectedness, understanding, and interpretation. It is also a hermetic paying tribute to his patron, Hermes, thereby embedding the young god into the cluster of godliness and divinity through a set of contradictory and ambiguous properties: “Pan reflects them all” (Calasso 124).

God of all nature, Pan personifies to our consciousness that which is all or only natural, behaviour at its most nature-bound. Nature-bound behaviour is, in a sense, divine; it is behaviour transcendent to the human yoke of purposes, wholly impersonal, objective, and ruthless. The cause of such behaviour is obscure; it springs suddenly, spontaneously. As Pan's genealogy is obscure, so is the origin of instinct. To define instinct as an inborn release mechanism, or to speak of it as a chthonic spirit, a prompting of nature, puts into obscure psychological concepts the obscure experiences that might once have been attributed to Pan. (Hillman xix)

On the level of consciousness, a pan experience refers to one that cheats even the most purposeful and wilful of actions, reinforcing a frenzy that quickly spreads among people

initially seen to have been fighting for a cause. The appearance of Pan in battle or an event induces panic on a mass scale, which can also be protective in nature, referring to the Janus-faced properties of Pan as both preserver and destroyer. However, the Pan of the study here is not the hairy, erected, roaming, goatish creature; it's a twin, an alter ego who is alone, reflective, the intuitive voice that talks to us, thereby invoking an inner experience. In the ancient Greek story of Ovid, when the helmsman announced that "The Great God Pan is dead", the dissociation between the two sides of the god as Nature and nature was in place. With the increase in the power and influence of Christianity and their notion of a single, apollonian God-induced consciousness, what one must realise is the breaking away of a culture previously in place that saw an intermingling of man and divinity in the same mould. As the embodiment of the wild and bountiful nature, the ex-situ Pan was *primarily coming into collision with in situ Pan, the god of the unconscious*, the dark recesses of the psyche. Relegating both to a status of imminent danger, the Pan archetype and the consciousness it evokes have been repressed. However, with the onset of the Pandemic, man has come face to face with this ancient god who seems to be walking amongst us in all its ancient glory.

The Great God Pan, the god of nature "in here" and nature "out there", has fallen out of coherence, often instigating man to dominate personified nature and his personified instinct with scientific temperament and logical reasoning to suit his purposes. Literature, which has mostly revolved around the Apollonian axis of dominant Western modes of thinking by sidelining archaic, indigenous modes of knowledge and being, has been questioned by psychology, prominently the depth psychology of Carl Jung. According to him, the modernist movements have alienated man further from nature, which has resulted in the dissociation of man into schizoid selves.

The pandemic caused by Covid 19 has platformed man's return to his innate self, scouring one's psyche for lost meanings of symbols, majorly myths. The latter, which has been used from pre-historic times to depict the cultural condition of a society, be it a disaster, war, or simply an event, has helped man figure out his position in the fulcrum of man-nature interconnectivity. The pan-nature filled with sexual excitation is also a bed of "subliminal panic", which, according to Brinkmann, the famous depth psychologist, is one of the proper reactions to the numinous. The panic signalled by the pandemic, which has given rise to an "infodemic" on a large scale, has also generated a large corpus driven by misinformation. Governmental agencies are controlling data, and this pandemic has provided a closer look at

the desperation of men in handling the coronavirus-induced pandemic. Man's bull-handedness in undertaking nature-related conservation activities has reawakened the God of nature from a deep slumber initiated by man's belief in his own Promethean abilities. The panic it has resulted in has become a way to reach the unconscious, the numinous and the uncontrollable, making man come in close contact with his preternatural self. Hillman says

When Jung said that we need to learn to fear again, he picked up the thread from the Old Testament, which states that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord and gave it a new twist. Now, the wisdom is that of the body that connects with the divine, as panic with Pan, with the same intensity as described in the sexual visions of Saints. Where panic is, there too is Pan. When the soul panics, as in the story of Psyche's suicide. Pan reveals himself with the wisdom of nature. To be fearless, without anxieties, without dread, and invulnerable to panic would mean a loss of instinct and connection with Pan. (xxxix)

“Dionysian dismemberment”, one of the critical aspects of Depth Psychology, is synonymous with Pan-centred consciousness wherein each aspect of the human psyche becomes a microcosm of a specific god. A colossal event of manifold proportion, like the spreading of the Coronavirus, has initiated a shift in the present mode of thinking, wherein Western models of learning were vindicated over the indigenous and marginalised forms of knowledge. The latter, largely nature-centric, is foregrounded in time-tested pantheistic structures of knowing and being.

Just as Pan blew the Pan pipes to eradicate panic, similarly, in several places worldwide, we saw people coming together at least metaphorically to dispel the corona-induced panic through the music they sang from their balconies. The time spent indoors mostly ridden over panic, thereby giving space for self-reflection, has activated the ultimate element of Pan consciousness: imagination. Resorting to reading and writing, riding on the wings of the imaginal faculty, we have crossed continents and travelled across time. The pandemic and its indefiniteness shall be preserved only through literature and books, which are the prime channels for our minds to cross over pan realms by which he has been released into nature and nature (human). With the decrease in pollution, more migratory birds travelling for mating, and the daily chirpings and movements of tiny animals around the homes, the return to a pan-induced consciousness is initiated.

Pan, the bridging element to nature and psyche, enables us to enjoy ourselves with nature. He brings together the objective processes with the subjective matter. He is also “the now and there”, the inside and the outside. Calasso says, “It is as if Pan is the answer to the Apollyonic question of self-knowledge”. What Susan Rowland calls “tacit knowing” or “instinctual knowledge”, motivated by the unconscious, is the dark, woody altar of Pan. The more it is repressed, the more it becomes uncontrollable. Another of the major shifts Pan consciousness instigates is a shift from a multidisciplinary to a transdisciplinary approach. The former refers to the coming together of people from various backgrounds and cultures to put their best foot forward while chipping in their expertise and knowledge for the betterment of the human race. At the same time, the latter believes in transcending borders, differences, and cultures, irrespective of a particular binary, and coming together to try various methods across all disciplines. The former believes in upending the dominant nature of discourses, which has mostly fallen short of its promises. At the same time, a transdisciplinary approach enables the empowerment of marginalised structures and discourses from antiquity onwards. Pan consciousness enables us to do this while encouraging imagination and creativity to go hand in hand with scientific knowledge and expertise. As Susan Rowland says, “It’s through panic, nightmare and horror that a repressed part of ourselves is remembered” (19). The post-pandemic scenario has provided the opposite platform for testing this reawakened and re-membered consciousness for working towards re-establishing interconnectivity between man and nature, taking a step closer to pre-historic times.

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