

Dwelling, Emotion and Resilience: An Inquiry into Home Spaces and Health in the Light of Heidegger and Navarasa

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ABSTRACT

In the challenges of contemporary life, resilience and adaptability have become essential to navigating health vulnerabilities, and emotional well-being. This paper examines how the environments we inhabit- particularly our home spaces- continue to the shaping of resilience. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's concept of *dwelling*, which views spaces as fundamental to human identity and being, the study explores how the aesthetic and emotional curation of domestic environments foster healing and adaptive strength. Through the lens of *Navarasa* theory, which articulates nine core emotional states, the research investigates how engagement with space can influence emotional well-being and support individuals in coping with health challenges.

Based on qualitative insights from adults aged 25-55, the study argues that consciously attending to one's living space is not merely a matter of design but a vital act of self-care and resilience-building. In an era, where health vulnerabilities intersect with the emotional landscape of daily life, the paper proposes that fostering resilience begins, in part, with how we dwell.

Keywords: *Resilience, Dwelling, Health Vulnerability, Navarasa, Home Spaces.*

Introduction

In a time marked by rapid technological growth, economic uncertainty, and shifting social structures, resilience and adaptability have emerged as pivotal characteristics to navigate contemporary life (Erikson, 1968). From global health catastrophes to personal challenges related to work, relationships, and identity, individuals face perpetual hustles that evaluate physical health as well as emotional welfare. In this context, the home has re-emerged more than just a shelter - it has acquired a primary role of healing, recovery, and self-regulation.

Today, health is no longer defined or perceived merely in clinical or biological terms, but as a blend of affective, cognitive, conative plus environmental factors. Increasingly, individuals,

post-COVID especially, are reporting symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and a general sense of emotional overwhelm-even in the absence of any medically diagnosed conditions. It ought to be noted, that these subtle health vulnerabilities are moulded not only by one's lifestyle but also by the environment in which one dwells.

As aforementioned, looking at the post-pandemic scenario, it is the home that plays an indispensable role in enhancing or diminishing the spirit of resilience. The ambience, layout, environment and affective plus energetic resonance of the home space can either escalate stress or resist it in a muted manner. Whilst interior décor or design is explored often from an aesthetic dimension, this paper delves into the philosophical facet - dwelling, of being in a space or place intentionally.

Contemporary literature and studies have explored the correlation of spaces impacting well-being transcending the functional or aesthetic part. To illustrate, Gernot Bohme (2017) quotes, "We perceive spaces not only with our senses but also with our mood (p.18). Similarly, research in environmental psychology has studied how the built environment or space plays a vital role in controlling stress, emotions and perceived control (2003)". This literature reiterates that special patterns affect not only an aspect like comfort, but also coping and healing as a part of the bigger picture. From the Indian context, scholars like Vatsyayan (1997), have tried to exhibit that a theory like Navarasa- originally elucidated for the facts of art and performance has a wider application and experiential scope across varied channels, transcending architecture and ritual space. This study tries to build on the application of Navarasa and the notion of Heidegger's Dwelling to everyday home environment, interrogating not just how we feel in space but rather how space helps us feel!

This curious exploration draws on Martin Heidegger's concept of dwelling (Wohnen), from his essay, Building, Dwelling, Thinking (1951) that contends human identity. It is steeply ingrained in how we inhabit space - transcending the physical and enveloping the existential. Complementing this idea, the paper shall integrate and contrast the Navarasa theory from the Indian aesthetic philosophical viewpoint - a grid of nine fundamental emotions that correspond to the affective and ambient properties of space.

In sync with this, this paper will go to show and highlight how curated home environments impart to the spirit of resilience, especially to aid individuals cope with everyday health vulnerabilities and challenges.

Theoretical Framework

Looking at the theoretical framework of this paper, it is rooted in two lenses: 1. Martin Heidegger's concept of dwelling (Wohnen), and the Indian aesthetic theory of Navarasa. It is vital to note, that both the theories emerge from contrasting cultural and philosophical ethos yet converge in their foothold on the association between the spot or scene, emotional encounter, and the establishment of meaning.

In his magnum opus work, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1951), Martin Heidegger has sought to redesign the notion of "dwelling" as transcending the idea of physical inhabitation. Dwelling, for Heidegger is a primary mode of human existenc. To dwell (wohnen), is to be in the world in a meaningful, perceptive, and an embedded manner. To quote Heidegger "We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell". Dwelling, in this context, is not an outcome or a product of architecture but its philosophical source or inception, which refers to an actual lived and a conscious or intended relationship between individuals and their spaces.

Heidegger moving on, brings in the fourfold aspects of the earth, sky, mortals and divinities - as the existential pre-requisites of dwelling. A home then, becomes a space or an expanse where this fourfold is preserved, and not merely an edifice of utility. With reference to this context, Heidegger's cognizance invites us to contemplate how individuals/people subsist within their spaces, how sense, purpose or definition is embedded in everyday sketches and patterns, and how space itself participates in cultivating a spirit of resilience. Similarly, Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space* asserted that a home is not only a functional enclosure, but a reservoir of memory, fancy, and poetic being. We can say that his phenomenological outlook complements Heidegger's by embedding dwelling in an affective experience and reverie.

This paper will complement the Heideggerean model of dwelling, with the Navarasa theory from Indian classical aesthetics. It posits nine rudimentary emotional states - from Sringara to Shanta (Love-peace). With reference to the context of space and dwelling here, each rasa can be embodied via the elements of colour, materiality, light, and memory within the home. Thus,

we can say that Navarasa enables an interpretive scaffolding to decode how individuals engage emotionally with domestic/household aesthetics, consenting space itself to become a catalyst for emotional resilience and metamorphosis.

Thus, we can say that this dual philosophical lens, sets the dais for examining how individuals establish or build resilience in the 21st century via the aesthetics of place amidst health vulnerabilities, challenges and uncertainty.

Findings And Analysis

This survey has collected responses from 16 participants aged 25-55 years, with majority falling in the age group of 31-40, among which males have been 25% and females 75%, occupations ranging from educators and IT professionals to wellness practitioners and marketing specialists. A heterogenous geographical base has been covered, including urban Indian cities like Pune, Mumbai as well as international respondents from Europe and the United States. Most of them have reported varied health challenges right from chronic fatigue to hormonal imbalance, stress induced migraines, post-COVID exhaustion, and even anxiety.

Here are some key findings from participant responses:

- 75% respondents agreed that their immediate physical space directly influenced their cognitive clarity and affective steadiness.
- More than 60% said that they deliberately tweaked or curated their home corners during recovery phase or burnout timelines.
- Visual tranquility (Colour palettes, art, open windows), and personal articles (Plants, paintings, spiritual artefacts), were stated as some of the holistic healing elements.
- 9 out of 16 participants demonstrated an ardent desire for spaces offering “retreat”, and inner alignment - especially during vulnerable and tumultuous phases.

The aesthetic encounter with spaces was linked to inner tranquility, innovative reinvention, or emotional stimulation, depending on the health state and mood.

Navarasa wise responses tilted strongly to Shringara, Shanta, and Karuna as the most desired rasas evoked by space.

These findings are indicative of deep (albeit subconscious), interplay between one's environment, affective identity, and perceptions about health.

Discussions And Findings

The findings clearly reinstate Heidegger's philosophical framework of dwelling - not just inhabiting a space but inhabiting it with presence. Participants who were active in terms of their engagement with their spaces, manifested a deeper connection with their internal state. This conscious engagement included reshuffling furniture, adding heartfelt artefacts or objects, or merely sitting in quietude with a candle or lamp. These actions are congruent with Heidegger's perspective, that to "dwell" is to seek meaning via space - a site where BEING is revealed.

Corresponding to the Navarasa theory, the emotional spectrum of space has been interpreted as a lived aesthetic expression. The Sringara rasa (beauty, love) is reflected in the participants' happiness over aesthetic nooks. Shanta (peace) is reflected in calm spaces, especially those who were in sync with daily rituals, plants or neutral hues. Karuna (compassion), manifested in spaces linked to memories, caregiving, or spiritual refuge. It is vital to note, that these emotional undercurrents were not only responses to a space, but also co-creators of well-being. As a contraindication, cluttered, dingy, or chaotic spaces evoked Raudra (anger), or Bhayanaka (fear) corresponding to stress and health drain.

Philosopher Gaston Bachelard states that home is a "nest for dreaming" and emphasizes the process of poetic images of space shaping the soul. Several participants confirmed to this, elucidating how rejuvenated they felt in the presence of their balconies, prayer areas or artwork. One respondent said, "I felt most whole, when I added fairy lights, and sat with a cup of hot tea near the balcony - it became my healing space." This is suggestive, that space is a dialogic partner as regards health, certainly not passive, but reciprocal, affective, and formative. Interpreting responses via the lens of both, Heidegger and Navarasa, this study discovers that aesthetics, memory, and emotions are not decorative accessories to well-being, they are rather its integral stepping-stone.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study unfolds that resilience, and adaptability in the 21st century are not just psychological traits, but are deeply interconnected with the philosophy of dwelling, emotional/affective expression, and sensory encounters. When we examine the curated

aesthetic dimension of home spaces through the lens of Heidegger's notion of "dwelling" and the affective spectrum of the Navarasa theory, this research underscores that engaging with spaces acts as a transformative tool for affective healing and minimizing stress.

The narratives laid down by participants highlight a subtle yet profound truth: Lived spaces, when consciously designed and inhabited, become an active site of reconstructing identity and resilience. Participants across varied age groups demonstrated that aesthetic and affective preferences in their surroundings offered comfort as well as composition, agency, and hope with respect to vulnerability, whether it is health, affective, or related to existential dynamics. When we take a closer look at everyday acts of space-making, for e.g. selecting a tranquil colour, including nostalgic artefacts, or laying a visual sequence, there is a cultivation of ontological security. This reiterates the notion that philosophical dwelling is not an abstraction, or an arbitrary choice, but an embodied act that permits one to face uncertainty with embeddedness, and grace.

Further, the blending of Indian aesthetic theory (Navarasa), in the context of the spatial realm, generates a fertile ground for cross-cultural dialogues between ancient affective philosophies, and contemporary architectural consciousness. This research inspires future interdisciplinary collaborations between philosophy, psychology, holistic wellness, as well as interior decor - promoting and enhancing a more conscious way of living. Last, but not the least, the findings assert that resilience as a spirit, can be designed, anthologized, and practiced - not just as a reactive coping mechanism, but also as a way of being, constructed via our intimate interactions with the spaces, nooks, and dimensions we call home.

Select visuals referenced in this study, are included in the appendix, (pp. 9-13), serving spatial documentation of authentic lived experiences that perceptibly convey the underlying rasas within personal and curated home spaces.

APPENDIX: Visual mapping of Navarasa in home décor.

The following visuals are curated from the author's home, illustrating how curated home spaces embody affective states in sync with the Navarasa framework. Each image is captioned with the corresponding rasa along with its affective or symbolic resonance it strikes in the spatial context.



Figure A1

Golden Buddha with peacock feather and foliage backdrop symbolizing “Shanta” (tranquillity)

This peaceful arrangement reflects the Rasa of shanta, figuring inner poise, and spiritual tranquility. The Buddha’s demeanor, gold detailing, and the integration of the peacock feathers create an aura of stillness and contemplative grace resonant with the

notion of home as a sanctuary and abode of emotional grounding.



Figure A2

Goddess Tara with Multicoloured Coral backdrop symbolizing “Adbhuta” rasa (wonder).

This image captures a brass sculpture of Goddess Tara, seated in a yogic posture with symbolic mudras. The intricate coral-like backdrop with red,

yellow, and green hues, brings in a manner of organic vitality. In distinction, her tranquil expression plus ornamentation generate curiosity with reverence.

The rasa evoked here is Adbhuta (wonder) - aesthetic delight rooted in the extraordinary. This rasa stems often from the essence of mystical, the divine, or the unexpectedly beautiful. This evokes and sustains an environment to pause, reflect, and remind inhabitants with context to dwelling, aspects of deeper cosmic order within daily surroundings.



Figure A3

Antlered Wall Mounts (Deer+Ram) symbolic of Bhayanaya (Terror) and Vira (Courage)

These animal heads on display, evoke the primal rasa of fear-A reminder of survival, the wild, and past conquests. However, an alternative perspective can also evoke Vira, that is symbolic of masculine strength, valour and dominance over nature. The juxtaposition of these emotions add a layered depth to the space.



Figure A4

Porcupine Sculpture on Wooden Slab, symbolic of Hasya (Humour) +Adbhuta (Wonder)

This sculpture stirs mild amusement with its spiky allure, and rounded form. Its exaggerated features plus texture lend a vivacious energy. The natural wood base adds an Adbhuta quality - earthy and unexpected - merging realism with whimsical artistry.

Final Comments

This paper set out to explore the dynamics between resilience, health vulnerabilities, spatial design, and emotional well-being by investigating how individuals interact with their home environments. Drawing on Heidegger, and the Navarasa scaffolding, the study has tried to offer

a layered grasp of how spaces carry emotional signatures - via textures, objects, routines, and varied symbolic artefacts.

Each image that is featured in the appendix, reflects a unique *rasa*, conveying that aesthetic preferences, sentimental objects, along with the intentional layout of space are not merely ornamental, but rather performative, deeply linked to memory, identity, and adaptive capacity. By rooting this inquiry into day-to-day activities, the study reinforces the idea that the home is a site of both, sanctuary, and subtle evolution - a place where the affective, and the architectural meet, constantly evolving via lived experience.

NOTE: *All photographs were taken by the author*

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