

## **Subjective Perceptions of Paulo Coelho towards Life's Learning Journey in His Major Fictional Works: An Analytical Study**

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### **Abstract**

*Paulo Coelho's fictional work is remarkable in all senses of literature. Paulo Coelho's every work is motivating, inspirational and philosophical for its readers. Present paper explains Paulo Coelho's perception towards life as a journey of self realization and introspection. In this paper all the major works of Paulo Coelho is analysed from the philosophical point of view. Study and analysis of in this paper not only includes his landmark work of Alchemist but also includes other major work like Zahir, Eleven Minutes, Brida, Veronica decides to die etc. all these work are analysed in the present paper. This paper aims at providing insight towards real essence of life considering spiritualism and philosophy as way of life.*

### **Key Words:**

Narratology, Magnetic, Non-Conformist, Journey, Madness, Asylum, Philosophy, Struggle, Power, Love, Goddess, Act of Faith, Happiness, Spirituality, Existential

## [1] Introduction

Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian lyricist and novelist is currently one of the most famous Latin American authors. He is the recipient of numerous international awards, including the Crystal Award by the World Economic Forum. He is originally from Brazil and has been enchanting readers around the world with his charming fictional expertise for nearly three decades.

## [2] Journey is a way of Life

Paulo Coelho's spellbinding novel *The Alchemist* is regarded as his masterpiece. It tells the story of a shepherd named Santiago who pursues his drive for finding hidden treasures that he visualizes in his dream. Through his adventurous efforts to make his dream true, he comes across a wide variety of people and places, faces different sorts of hazards, explores the significance of love and most remarkably, discovers the true meaning of life on top of getting hold of the treasures he had been questing for. In this novel, Paulo Coelho virtually moved into the shoes of legendary writers like Henry Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling with his superb narratology and magnetic stories.

Before a dream is realized the soul of the World tests everything that was learnt along the way. It does this not because it is evil, but so that we can, in addition to realizing our dreams, master the lessons we've learned as we've moved towards that dream. That's the point at which most people give up. It's the point at which as we say in the language of the desert, one 'dies' of thirst just when the palm trees have appeared on the horizon. (39)

## [3] Madness in Life

Coelho through his life experiences had internally come to terms with the fact that everyone must live out his or her madness. A little bit of madness is quite healthful. In one of his interviews with Marika Schaerti he says:

If madness means being other than "normal" that is fine with me. If it is threatening for oneself and society, there is a problem. My motto is: A little bit of madness is quite healthful. (35)

In *Veronica Decides to Die*, Paulo used Zedka as mouth piece to express his philosophy about madness. Zedka says:

Although I'm undergoing a cure, because my problem is that I lack a particular chemical. However, while I hope that the chemical gets rid of my chronic depression, I want to continue being mad, living my life the way I dream it, and not the way other people want it to be. (30)

On the other hand, he discovered another most important thing in his asylum ordeals. He tells that on the first day he was shocked to see himself there. Next day he discovered his strong temptation of living life pretending to be mad and doing nothing. By the third day he became used to the life, he found life is not so bad there. He felt even comfortable and protected there from the problems on the outside. He compared it with maternal womb that gives tranquility. When he analyzed his thought that arrived, he concluded that "The big danger of madness is not madness itself, but the habit of madness"(Arias, 36).

#### **[4] Coelho's Tryst with Madness and Asylum**

Coelho asserts that many people enjoy being an asylum to evade their responsibilities and obligations and this he concludes from his own experience. Coelho criticize this attitude throughout the novel. In the novel, Dr. Igor tells Mari that the people only allow themselves the luxury of being mad when they are in a position to do so. With the course of time, Mari understands importance of struggle, responsibility and risk and decides to leave the asylum to undertake her responsibilities of the life outside. In fact, the novel *Veronica Decides to Die* is a powerful expression of Coelho's tryst with madness and asylum.

#### **[5] Echo of Coelho's Philosophy**

Coelho's philosophy is voiced in the words of Mari in *Veronica Decides to Die* when Mari tells Eduard that everything happens in one's life is one's own fault. A lot of people go through the same difficulties but they react differently. People look for the easiest way out which they call it 'separate reality'. She tells him:

I never want to be a lawyer again, but I can use my experience to give lectures about men and women who knew the truth about this experience of ours and whose writings can be summed up in one world: Live. If you live, God will live with you, if you refuse to run his risks, He'll retreat to that distant Heaven and be merely a subject for philosophical speculation. (137)

Coelho believes that each human being is unique, each with his own instincts, forms of pleasure and desire for adventure. However, society always imposes on us a collective way of behaving. Since the ages human being is trying to find answer to the question why one must follow a specific conventional behavioral pattern. When we reject to behave

according to that pattern, the society frowns on us. One who breaks the tradition and goes against the conventional codes will be called a mad man. Fearing this, man prefers to walk on the trodden way by following the socially sectioned path. But Coelho's books celebrate unconventional behavioral pattern. He believes that one must dare to have different identity. Dr. Igor tells Mari, "You're someone who is different, but who wants to be same as everyone else. And that, in my view, is a serious illness." (153)

## [6] Significance of Struggle in Life

Like Coelho, Eduard too suffers for recognizing and pursuing his true vocation by going against conformity. His parents took it as a sign of insanity and they admit him to asylum. Mari tells Eduard that the price he paid for having to deal with those minor problems is far less than the price he would pay for not recognizing they were his. While the Alchemist tells Santiago that it is a lot better to die in the midst of trying to realize one's own destiny than dying like millions of other people, who never even knew what their destinies were.

## [7] *Ithaca* by Constantine

According to Coelho, life is more beautiful in the moments we struggle. When we stop struggling, life becomes meaningless. For Coelho, *Ithaca* by Constantine Cavafy is proper philosophy of life. All his novels appear to be based on the theme of the poem *Ithaca*. In fact, he celebrates in his novels the thought of this poem. The protagonists of his novels take journey to unknown place and return home becoming wise. Ithaca- is a metaphor of birth and death, that great journey we all have to make, whether we want to or not. Coelho tells this in his novel *The Alchemist*:

The soul of the world is nourished by people's happiness and also unhappiness, envy and jealousy. To realize one's destiny is a person's only real obligation. All things are one. And when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it. (23)

This outlook of life is reflected in all his books. He shows how the good aims, dreams and thoughts bring positive result in process of nourishment of the soul of the world. Only the exception is *The Winner Stands Alone*. The protagonist too nourishes the soul of the world but with evil aim and thought. As a consequence, though he wins, his world is destroyed and he is left alone in the world completely beyond repair. In fact, his victory is his absolute defeat. The same philosophy Coelho envisages in his *The Alchemist* - the world is the only visible aspect of God. And what alchemy does is to bring spiritual perfection into contact with the material plane.

## [8] Power of Love

Coelho is a firm believer in the power of love. According to him, love is the only force which has the power to change the world. About love, Santiago tells wind, sun and desert:

When you love ... there's no need at all to understand what's happening, because everything happens within you, and even men can turn themselves into wind . if you know about love, you must also know about the soul of the world because it's made of love..It's not love to be static like desert, nor is it love to roam the world like wind. And it's not love to see everything from distance, like you do (Sun). Love is force that transforms and improves the soul of the world. When I first reached through it, I thought the soul of the world was perfect. But later, I could see that it was like other aspects of creation, and had its own passions and wars. It was we who nourish the soul of the World, and the world we live in will be either better or worse, depending on whether we become better or worst. And that's where the power of love comes in. Because when we love, we always strive to become better than we are. (155-9)

Whereas in *The Witch of Portobello* Paulo reveals an idea that 'Love is Liberty.'

## **[9] Great Mother Goddess**

Coelho's books essentially speak about the face of Great Mother Goddess. Particularly his books focus on the female aspect of divinity, thus it includes prominently and is based on elements of paganism. Paulo writes that those who love conquer the world and have no fear of loss. The traditional religious practices are important. They allow us to share with others the communal experience of adoration and prayer but we must not forget that spiritual experience is above all a practical experience and the spiritual path can only be travelled through the daily experience of love. Who takes the path of love always suffers but in every love there lies the seed of growth. The more we love, the closer we come to spiritual experience and our souls are truly enlightened and illuminated by the love and can experience 'madness of saintliness'. True love is an act of total surrender.

## **[10] Life as an Act of Faith**

Coelho believes that life is an act of faith. He illustrates his philosophy wonderfully in *Brida*. Spending the night in forest Brida learnt about the Dark Night. She learnt that the search of God is like a Dark Night. None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, and still we go

forward. It's only because we trust and have faith. We just don't see the mystery contained in the next second. And that every moment in life is an act of faith.

### **[11] Coelho's Views on Happiness**

Coelho's novels assert the most important law- changing your vision and thinking would change the world around you. He makes reader to see the hidden and unseen stratum of visions and thoughts. His book *The Fifth Mountain* too speaks about the faith conspicuously. In *By the River Piedra I sat Down and Wept* Coelho has given voice of his philosophy:

There are many ways to serve our Lord. If that's your destiny, go in search of it. Only a man who is happy can create happiness in others. (104)

### **[12] Paulo's Spirituality**

Paulo Coelho is an enchanting storyteller, inspiring people all over the world to see beyond the ordinary and into the remarkable. He wants to pass on his views about how we receive spiritual guidance or wisdom. His perspective involves talking about both the mind and the heart .The popularity of his teaching owes much to the rejection of organized religion as well as the way in which it offers an antidote to the inadequacy of atheistic existentialism in supplying meaning, value and purpose. For Coelho spirituality is a personal and individual approach. The Times rightly observes, 'His books have had a life-enhancing impact on millions of people'. Paulo Coelho is a storyteller with the power to inspire nations and to change people's lives.

### **[13] Existential Perspective on Coelho**

A non-conformist that he is, Coelho believes the unknown, while armoring himself with tool of Spirituality, which preaches tolerance and eschews fundamentalism. He is convinced that the spiritual pursuit, a strong ethical commitment from every individual and the value of tolerance can go a long way in combating the evils of late modernity. The spiritual search, he believes, is the search for total consciousness of oneself. Making this an epitome of his literary truth, he evolves as an author in Search of himself. Thus in working towards the enlightenment of the self, Coelho ends up being a spiritual but he truly begins on an existential note when his self confronts the meaninglessness, the nothingness, the absurd, the compulsion of choice, the anxiety and the angst of an existence surrounded by boredom. His existential involvement dates back to his teenage years when he got interested in the literature of Heidegger and Sartre. As a writer, he picks up their absurdist mood and makes his characters suffer the boredom, the tedium underlining their 'awkward presence' (The *Zahir*, 249) in a world where they 'didn't ask to be born' (*Eleven Minutes*,

64) and where they are compelled to choose 'in order to give meaning to their lives' (*Eleven Minutes*, 109). With existential trials and tribulations bogging them down, Coelho's characters dream, suffer as they choose to fulfill their dream and in the process come out with a new perception of things, making headway towards spiritual transcendence. Beginning with an existential self, struggling to create a meaning out of the existential into the spiritual, there operate various motifs like love, journey, magic realism, epiphany, signs and omens that serve as means of transcendence from matter to spirit.

## [14] Conclusion

Even if it is not a full-fledged and systematically developed one, Coelho's view of life is a simple but admirable one. He does not bother for the unraveled mysteries of the creation nor about the unsolved questions of the nature of the universe vis-a-vis life. He is interested in studying the ordinary worries of a common man and attempts to provide peace and happiness to such. The remedies he suggests may not be of a sublime metaphysical dimension. But his suggestions to provide peace and prosperity to the human beings are convincing and easily practicable.

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