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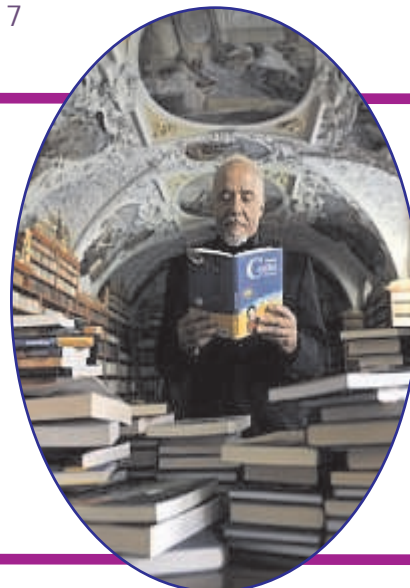


PAULO COELHO - A WRITER OF ABSTRACT

Dr. D. Sindhu¹ and Dr. Paramjit Kaur²

¹PGT English, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Portblair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

²Guest Faculty, Department of English, Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM), Portblair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.



ABSTRACT:

Paulo Coelho is known to be a stirring writer. His works have the power to influence the people. Usually the things which are dismissed away as abstract or philosophical are the very foundation of his works. This paper attempts to explore the abstract in the select novels *The Alchemist*, *Veronica Decides to Die*, *Winner Stands Alone*, and *The Devil and Miss Pry*, of Coelho. It explores the central idea of the novels which make the author's work seem abstract, the techniques he uses to execute his ideas. At the same time what is highlighted is the underlying fact that 'self awakening' is a recurrent subject matter in his novels which he presents through the journey of his characters.

KEYWORDS: Foreshadowing, Magic Realism, Symbolism, Destiny, Setting, Meaning of Life.

INTRODUCTION

Paulo Coelho, one of the renowned, best sellers of the contemporary epoch has time and again presented before the world the abstract, the beyond materialistic way of life through his novels. As per glossary 'Abstract' is from Latin word meaning "pulled away, detached," and the basic idea is of 'something detached from physical or concrete reality. It is frequently used of ideas, meaning that they do not have a clear applicability to real life, and of art, meaning that it does not pictorially represent reality'. The term abstract is applied to 'ideas that are philosophical and emotional, not concrete or tangible, yet the idea come from experience'. To put it in simple words it means 'existing only in mind separated from embodiment'.

A study of Paulo Coelho's novels will reveal that his emphasis has always been on the abstract of life, has always been on those ethereal issues which have invited every mind to mull on and never arrive at an agreeable conclusion. His world famous *The Alchemist* which has been proclaimed as a mantra to lead life; *The Devil and Miss Prym*, a conspicuous narration on the age old battle between the good and the evil; *Veronica Decides to Die* which questions the ordinary and inspires to listen to the heart; *The Winner Stands Alone* which talks of the worldly desires as an illusion - his novels talk of the abstract which always hovers the mind but is usually ignored or silenced in the cut throat viable way of life.

In order to bring alive the abstract Paulo Coelho uses two powerful narrative techniques of foreshadowing and magic realism. His settings are usually in far flung places which cater to the fancy world that he creates to depict his ideas. *The Alchemist* begins with an Andalusian boy Santiago who goes in search of his personal legend to Egypt. He journeys his way through Africa, hill, Sahara Desert, sand dunes and Al-Fayoum Oasis. *The Devil and Miss Prym* is set in a small town called Viscos. The community in Viscos is composed of 281 individuals, all adults. A village which has no genext, creates a perfect battleground for the good and the evil.

Veronica Decides to Die takes place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, a few years after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The action of the story begins with the very question, "Where is Slovenia?" There would not have been a better place than Villeite, a mental asylum, for Veronica to realize the worth of life. "The Winner Stands Alone", though set in Cannes but the place turns immaterial in the world of Igor. Cannes Film festival is just the backdrop for the narrative to unroll.

The plot of Paulo Coelho runs on the modus operandi of two wheels - prophecy and magic realism. This somewhere makes Coelho an author of heart and soul rather than mind and world. His works are never a saga of daily affairs but a yearning for beyond which the characters realize through their experience lies within. "Transcendentalism considers intuition as the highest human faculty. The transcendental idea of intuition is implemented in 'The Alchemist' by the philosophical symbol 'universal language', (Manju Murleedharan, 56). Santiago believes that there is a language which everybody understands, the language of soul, of the universe, the language of the dreams that is why he sets on his journey to realize his dream of personal legend. Melchizedk's arrival and his magical stones Urim and Thummim bring in mysticism. When Santiago reaches Al-Fayoum he has a vision of an upcoming battle. The realistic and the fantastic elements impeccably blend when Santiago uses his comprehension of the 'Soul of the World' to ask the elements to help him. First he asks the desert, then he asks the wind, then he asks the sun and, lastly, he asks the 'Soul of the World'. Immediately, the wind whisks up, and Santiago disappears and reappears on the other side of the camp. "For almost fifteen years, old Berta had spent every day sitting outside her front door...that morning her waiting came to an end when she saw the stranger climbing the steep hill up to the village... his clothes were shabby, he wore his hair unfashionably long, he was unshaven. And he was accompanied by the Devil" (Coelho, 1). This introductory paragraph from *The Devil and Miss Prym* puts forth Coelho's machinery of intuition and fantastic elements.

Veronica, a young girl of 24, decides to commit suicide as she finds nothing interesting and thinks old age would only be worse. This fearful inkling about her future triggers the action of the novel and sets her life on self-discovery. The awe in *The Winner Stands Alone* is omnipresent. He presents the simplest philosophy of life in a heart churning manner. Igor in his pursuit to send his wife a message that he will welcome her back in his life despite her past mistake begins killing people. Ewa gets and understands Igor's message and fears for her and her current husband's life. The sixth sense of Igor that his wife will get his non-verbal message, and Ewa's fear of the unsaid adds to Coelho's elucidation of the abstract. Symbolism is a part and parcel of Coelho's narration which helps explain the themes of the novels and adds to the mysticism. In fact his characters too are symbolic in nature, especially the minor characters. Somewhere Coelho's novels bring into mind the Morality plays, the difference being the presentation; Coelho's narration is not direct or sermonizing in nature he explores the journey of his character the journey of the mind and the soul. He chronicles the awakening of his character.

The ordinary minds can never sense the abstract. It has to be the peculiar or say the unconventional ones who dare to question the norms be aware of the abstract. It is easy to follow the routine, to train our behavior in a set pattern. Molding self into an acceptable way is never scary. What takes courage is to pause and think in silence. Silence has the power to penetrate into self and the first discovery could be the impression of life being a waste, nothing catering to the divine self but introspection is the journey to find the divine and the utility of the world that human beings are born in. The ordinary can never have the crossing from Siddharat to Gautam Budh. Paulo himself has been an experimenter of life so it is only natural for him to create characters who would dare to question and go in search of 'the elixir of life'. His characters apparently seem ordinary but they have the ears to listen to their heart. Santiago, whose quest shot Coelho to name and fame, heard his heart speak and became a Shepard to be able to see the world around. He is curious to listen to the voices around him and interpret it through the filter of his mind. He is perseverance in the flesh, despite facing difficulties he never gives up. The fact that there will be problems on the way to achieve one's heart's desires he never stops rather when faced with problems he handles the situation coolly and continues his journey. All robbed he was left nowhere to go but instead of being disheartened he worked in a crystal shop, earned enough to restart his journey. Chantal Prym is the depiction of a normal human being with strengths and weaknesses. One raises oneself through the decisions one takes. Chantal like Santiago listened to her heart and did not allow the evil to overpower her. Veronica, a young girl who should have been enjoying her life attempts suicide because of the mediocrity of life

and gets freedom from fear, understands the value of life and grabs it with both hands. Igor is one such character of Coelho who may not be a role model but his philosophies cannot be ignored. Igor and Jasmine are the ultimate persons to be as both of them know and comprehend the world around them but are not charmed by their environs. The characters of Paulo Coelho have self awakening. They do not allow their natural spirit to be killed rather their lives are all about finding themselves, understanding the very human spirit which craves freedom to think, to act, to experience and learn.

Coelho states, "The meaning of life is the meaning you give to your life." All his characters seem to be putting this line of their creator in practice. We all are born with our destiny, we can only try to change it. This attempt to change is important. It is this attempt by his characters which make them stand out of the crowd. It is this endeavor which elevates his character from ordinary to exotic and inspirational ones. Destiny is the hidden and over brooding character in the novels of Coelho. It gives every individual the chance to follow his/her dreams. Santiago's dream, Melchizedek, the Alchemist, Berta, Dr. Igor they are the helping hands to reach one's goals. Destiny is never rude in the narrative of Paulo Coelho but the silent Genie who waits for the command of the human to set into motion the game of dream fulfillment.

Pure abstract would never connect layman to Coelho's novels, then what is it that has made people wait for his works? The answer rests in the fact that every question related to human soul is an essential part of one's life. Coelho's novels provides answers to the questions that have been left unanswered or it makes the people to think about the questions or the deeper aspects of life from which they have been running or ignoring. Every thought raised in his novels is the thought of every mind. People see their questions being sought out. Rousseau says that human beings are born free but chained everywhere. Coelho talks about breaking those chains to realize the abstract, the serene which does not lie in the core of the universe but within us. Paulo Coelho very well understands the reason for the human beings to feel caged that is why in an interview he says, "We live in a world of standard behavior, standard beauty, quality, intelligence, efficiency. We believe there is standard for everything, and we believe, too, that if we stick to that standard we will be safe..." It is this embedded thought that one needs to get rid off to experience life to the fullest, to realize the so called abstract.

In *Veronica Decides to Die*, Coelho tries to portray the reason why people are dismayed and give up seeking the joy of life through the character of Mari. Mari, a wife, mother, and successful lawyer, is treated for intense panic attacks. Dr. Igor tells her that she can go back home but Mari says she wants to give time to her husband for recouping from the stress he had to face. When she is cured of her symptoms and is ready to leave and recommence her life, a colleague tells her that she is being asked to resign. She begs him to let her return, stating "I have lived with two sorts of people: those who have no chance of ever going back into the society and those who are completely cured but who prefer to pretend to be mad rather than face up life's responsibilities. I want and need to learn myself again, have to convince myself that I'm capable of taking my own decisions." (Coelho, 116) He remains rigid, and she loses her job. Few days later, a lawyer visits her and informs her that her husband wants divorce from her. Completely distraught and broken she tells Dr. Igor that her symptoms have returned and request him to let her continue staying there. Though he knows she is lying, he agrees, and Mari becomes exactly the type of 'reality-avoiding' patient she pleaded her colleague to spare her from becoming. Another patient, Eduard, is being treated for schizophrenia. Born to a rich and powerful Yugoslavian ambassador, Eduard is brought up to follow in his father's footsteps. He develops an ambition to paint. His father strongly criticizes and disapproves, and forces him to put efforts on becoming a diplomat. Not willing to further dissatisfy him, Eduard gives away his dream of painting and pursues his father's wishes and ambitions. However at the rear of this decision Eduard loses his hold on reality and is diagnosed with schizophrenia and lands up at Villette.

Unfortunately love which should have been a liberating force is often turned into a binding force. Santiago is lucky enough to experience the love of Fathima who asks him to leave her and go in search of his dream. Love of Carlos for his family turns bitter at the loss of his family and he becomes vengeful. Igor Malev, who in the name of love 'destroys world', Veronica is filled with guilt at the unconditional love given by her mother and she attempting suicide but later finds meaning to her life with Eduard. Zedka follows her love irrespective of what the people will say and ends up in mental asylum. Allowing one to follow one's passion is love. Coelho has always

emphasized through his novels that love has to be the path finding power. Lack of it or love taking the form of compulsion or obligation can harm the natural personality of an individual.

CONCLUSION

Coelho presents the deeper aspects of life which is usually termed as philosophical or conceptual. What is called as spirituality or abstract or beyond the real life is the hard core reality of this universe. Human beings are a tiny existence in this vast cosmos, one life to live; it cannot be wasted away within the confines of irrational norms of the society. Ethos lies in exploring, knowing one's self, in letting oneself go, in finding harmony with oneself rather than burning in jealousy or judging oneself through standards set by others. Paulo Coelho depicts exactly this through his strong multi-dimensional narrative techniques, free-spirited characters. He tries to seek answers to the abstract questions of life through the voyage of his characters.

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