

“A Tenacious Journey Towards Spiritual Enlightenment In The Select Novels Of Paulo Coelho”

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Abstract

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Paulo Coelho's novels take us to an inner journey almost into the hidden power of our life. He blends philosophy, religious miracle, love, fear of loss in his fiction and makes them sound like moral parables. Incantations, rituals, spells and charms are integral to witchcraft in the Southeastern Europe. Folk healing is the task of the village witch, who possesses some special skills. In Bulgaria, the villages are typically maintained by one white witch – a practitioner of healing magic , and one black witch – a practitioner of harmful magic.

In Slovenia, female witches derive their power from a lunar Goddess and the male wizards sought to protect the village from evils. Paulo Coelho attempts to present a woman who endeavours to seek God through music and dance. Signs, visitations, witchcraft, the Great Mother, mysticism, meditation and magic are the ingredients of the novel *The Witch of Portobello*. In this research article ,the researcher attempts to show how Paulo Coleho's women characters attain spiritual enlightenment through their tenacious journeys.

Key Words: Signs, visitations, witchcraft, the Great Mother, mysticism, meditation and magic, etc.

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I. “A Tenacious Journey towards Spiritual Enlightenment in the Select Novels of Paulo Coelho”

Paulo Coelho's novels take us to an inner journey almost into the hidden power of our life. He blends philosophy, religious miracle, love, fear of loss in his fiction and makes them sound like moral parables. Incantations, rituals, spells and charms are integral to witchcraft in the Southeastern Europe. Folk healing is the task of the village witch, who possesses some special skills. In Bulgaria, the villages are typically maintained by one white witch – a practitioner of healing magic , and one black witch – a practitioner of harmful magic.

In Slovenia, female witches derive their power from a lunar Goddess and the male wizards sought to protect the village from evils. Paulo Coelho attempts to present a woman who endeavours to seek God through music and dance. Signs, visitations, witchcraft, the Great Mother, mysticism, meditation and magic are the ingredients of the novel *The Witch of Portobello*. In this research article ,the researcher attempts to show how Paulo Coleho's women characters attain spiritual enlightenment through their tenacious journeys.

Paulo Coleho talks about his views on the feminine side of God in one of his interviews through the following lines ,

I do believe that for many centuries, religion or the quest for the spiritual realm was linked to the male figure, so God is the father, God is the one who get to rule us. We forgot totally that above all, God is love, and love is, in my opinion, in my understanding, it is simplified because, of course, God has no sex, but love belongs to this feminine face of the Lord, of the divine energy. So *The Witch of Portobello*, the main character, tries somehow to bring this love, this universal love to her life (P 45).

In novel *The Witch of Portobello*, Athena’s ex-husband Lukas presents himself as a person who has followed his parents’ rules with implicit obedience. However, there is a strong indication that Lukas is wavering between rationality and mysticism. Paulo Coelho describes Athena’s dancing in the restaurant in Romania as “a goddess revealing herself in all her glory, a priestess invoking angels and demons” (130). Music and Dance play a significant role in this novel. In fact they are said to be the most powerful forms of communicating with God. In every culture and every religion songs and dances are there to glorify God. The dance ritual can be seen as magical transformation of the narrative itself. Towards the end of Athena’s ecstatic dance, she communicates with someone or something supernatural in the novel.

Philemon and Hagia Sophia are the supernatural spirits with whom Athena communicates. Philemon is the silent guide of Athena because Athena does not listen to what her male spirit guide tells her, but still she knows when he is present. When Athena decides to converse with Philemon, it seems that Hagia Sophia and Philemon will talk about love. It is Philemon (or Heron) who asks what love was, and it is Athena who conveys the meaning of love and guides him. Hagia Sophia or Sherine Khalil are the other two names of Athena in the novel.

The concept of love transforms Athena and the blank spaces that she is trying to fill in seem to relate to the absence of Athena’s birthmother. As Athena moves on in her quest to completely fill in the blank spaces, she gets in touch with the Mother through the guidance of a person called Deidre O’Neil. In the novel, Athena gets a vision of the mother in a mirror in Deidre’s house. The mirror which represents a reflecting surface, changes into a magical tool for transformation and creation. Hence magical realism assumes a vital role in transforming the meanings of existing concepts in this novel.

In the novel *Brida*, the protagonist named Brida desires to become a witch, so she sought the aid of the Magus who taught her the teachings of the Tradition of the Sun and of the wisdom about things, and Wicca who educated her of the Tradition of the Moon. It includes the performance of the different rituals corresponding to the different cycles of the moon; to dance in tune to the Sound of the World, to identify the different cures of herbs, and to feel the energy or vibes of the clothes she owns. Her journey is more of a spiritual transformation. Through the rituals and exercises that Wicca assigned her to do, she was able to awaken the dormant voice of her soul that signified her readiness to be initiated as a full-pledged witch. However, her journey did not stop there.

The ultimate condition for her self actualization is her attitude to transform all the knowledge she has learned into wisdom. Through the use of the force of sex, it opens the portal to both real and magical worlds for Brida. With the help of her soul mates, she was able to attain the pinnacle of her journey in both the spiritual and material planes. The Magus is a man who isolates himself from the world, an act he dutifully performs as a recompense for his prior violation on the law of love. He was in love and got hurt, but the worst part of it was that he violated the fundamental law of love that is interfering in one’s free will. His only redemption is to wait for his soul mate to arrive and set him free from his bondage without his interference or manipulation of any kind to encourage the growth of love.

His journey started in his detachment from the world as his penalty and spent most of his life in the forest learning from it. The forest presented him another lesson that would define his existence in the form of Brida- his soul mate. His journey with Brida taught him patience, and most importantly, to love freely without expecting anything in return. To be a fully actualized person, the Magus learns that love is liberty, and because of that discernment, he is again free to return to the world and has continued on being a Teacher of the Tradition of the Sun.

The term mystical theology denotes a direct experience with the divine. Typically mystics see their mystical experiences as part of a larger undertaking aimed at human transformation. In general, mysticism is all about the distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions and experiences aimed at human transformation. Transformation of life is more important than conversion of religion. The very purpose of religion is to transform the human beings to commune with the ultimate Supreme power called God. The very existence on this earth itself is the greatest thing in the world and if we realize that this life is only a one time opportunity, we will definitely strive to make a difference in the world.

The protagonist of the novel *The Witch of Portobello* illustrates Athena’s life which incorporates distinctive practices, discourses, traditions and experiences solely to attain the divine spark. But she is called a witch by one Rev. Ian Buck. Her initial experience of trance is discovered by her parents in the church which she most frequently visits. At first her mother ignores her visions of invisible friends – angels and saints as it is quite natural for children to have visions which they forget as they grow. But the following incident agitates her mother when Athena has said that “she had seen a woman dressed in white like the Virgin Mary”(TWP23).

Suddenly one night she reports her that hell is closer which scares her a lot. At times she confesses her spiritual energy to Lukas. She also shares her experience of getting into trance as soon as the music is played at church. She not only has a special gift for music but also for dance. Many a time, Lukas has seen her playing guitar and singing hymns in praise of the holy Virgin as if the atmosphere has been touched by the hand of an

angel. He realizes a sense of paradise, of possession by the sacred. Talking about the possession by the sacred, Athena quotes, “[...] The fact is that, to a greater or lesser extent, all creative human beings have such experiences, which are known as “possession by the sacred” [...] for a fraction of a second, we feel that our whole life is justified, our sins forgiven and that love is still the strongest force, one that can transform us forever (P38). Her trance like state mystifies Lukas. In such an occasion, he is only conscious of the present neither the past nor the future. This is what is referred to as Hunches by Paulo Coelho in *The Alchemist*. He enters into a state of worship, ecstasy and gratitude for being in the world. He senses the grandeur of God, through which simple things are revealed to him. Besides, Athena remarks,

When I come here to praise the Virgin with my music, I’m not bothered about what other people might think. I’m simply sharing my feeling with her. And that’s how it’s always been, ever since I was old enough to think for myself. I’m a vessel in which the divine energy can make itself manifest. And that energy is asking me now to have a child, so that I can give it what my birth mother never gave me: protection and security (*TWP* 41).

Athena’s divine quest begins in the second phase of her life, after she divorces her husband Lukas due to marital disharmony. The very incident that has created this sort of impact is when she has been forbidden to enter into the church since she is a divorcee. From her initial beginnings as a devout member of the Catholic Church, to her humiliating dismissal, Athena searches for a way to fit into the world on a spiritual level. She finds herself connecting to her spiritual self through music and dance. Like any good prophet she shares her discovery with those around her.

Through her newly embraced spirituality, she prospers in her life that she is able to travel extensively and learn new ways to channel her mystic side. She rents a house in an apartment where the owner of that apartment holds a dancing ritual at night. They strongly believe that while doing so, they are in touch with something stronger and more powerful. Seeing her obsession with dance, the owner Pavel teaches her to dance, in accordance with the sound made by natural things that move to unearthly rhythms while dancing. Athena perceives herself to be a free spirit that takes her to sublime heights, contemplates the present, divines the future which is finally transformed into pure energy. She says, “... and that gives me enormous pleasure, a joy that always goes far beyond everything I’ve experienced or will experience in my life time” (P 61). In a way of elevating her mind, the owner talks about the vertex in dance – the culminating point.

Paulo Coelho pays a verbal tribute to dance by highlighting its nobility. In this novel, he glorifies dance that bridges the human soul and the divine spark. He says in the novel about dance in the following lines, “...Dance only to the sound of percussion; repeat the process every day; know that, at a certain moment your eyes will, quite naturally, close and you will begin to see a light that comes from within, a light that answers your questions and develops your hidden powers” (P 64).

The works of Paulo Coelho celebrate and eulogize life in all its varied manifestations. There is a feeling of absolute calmness that enhances a sanctimonious feeling in the mind of every reader who goes through the fiction of Paulo Coelho. He entices the reader in a tryst with mysticism. He is often called an alchemist of words and his narratives open up new vistas in perceiving life in the modern world. No one can deny the fact that Paulo Coelho’s novels and characters take us to the pinnacle of spiritual heights.

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