

Concept of Hybrid Spirituality in the works of Paulo Coelho

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Abstract

The present paper in an effort to understand the concept of hybrid spirituality and varied cultural dimensions in the works of Paulo Coelho. Spiritual aspects have always been a dominant feature in majority of Coelho's works. Paulo Coelho himself has become a synonym of spiritual genre among the contemporary readers. In most of his works the spiritual aspect is ignited, activated and adopted by the protagonists through a series of interconnected incidences which finally led to self-awareness. The multicultural background of Coelho had provided fertile ground for Coelho's protagonist to establish, to understand and accept the diversified spiritual philosophies in different places. This Phenomenon of knowing 'self' through self-introspection along with the connection, understanding and restoration with the divine. Coelho himself had experienced this spiritual enlightenment which is the result of 'multidimensional' spiritual and cultural aspect which he had imbibed from his childhood in Brazil. The prismatic aspect of spirituality which Coelho projects in his work always made his readers connected to him across the boundaries. He discards the theory of spiritual globalization and believes that it is one's spiritual responsibility to discover one's spiritual zenith, which can be from any philosophy across the world, this captivating narration relish readers in the multidimensional spiritual spree which he creates.

Keywords: Spirituality, Philosophy, Hybrid, Self-awareness, Multidimensional.

Concept of Hybrid Spirituality in the works of Paulo Coelho

Hybrid Spirituality is a concept adopted and appreciated by those who believe and tries to find truth and tries to quench their spiritual queries through multidimensional philosophies, culture and traditions. Coelho's protagonists fall in this category who draws their inner strength from a multitude of traditions and apply them in real life. This is an achievement which helps them to lead a peaceful and serene life aftermath. Hybrid spirituality imbibes the concept of plurality of entitles. The present paper is an effort to understand this concept of spiritual hybridity in Coelho's works where his

protagonists ventured their original spiritual traditions beyond their ‘set’ limits and finally grew as seekers who inculcated ideas outside their traditions and religion.

As he explains this in his work, *The Pilgrimage*.

“We are always trying to convert the people to a belief in our own explanation of the universe. We think that the more people there are who believe as we do, the more certain it will be that what we believe is the truth. But it doesn’t work that way at all” (*The Pilgrimage* 92)

Coelho had always forwarded the theory of heterogeny in culture and religion. As he told Aris about the Globalization of God that,” The idea of a homogenous culture made to everyone’s measure horrifies me, I am frightened of the idea of a Standard God”, dogmatically for everyone as opposed to the personal to what can be discovered by the color of the consciousness of each human being. Culture and religion have to be the expression of the individual soul (*Arian Page 80*). Spirituality is a multifaced and broad concept that can imply different understanding and acceptability within oneself where one’s soul can find a sense of peace and serenity. Some people may co-relate spirituality with religion while others may relate it to social service and empathy. So, this concept cannot be reserved to a solo thought process or an anarchist view. This paper is an effort to rationalize this concept. This is also an indispensable part that spirituality gives a sense of purpose for life helps us to connect with something which is beyond our imagination and larger than our conserved concepts. It finally provides us a way connect and reconnect with our soul and the divine power.

Coelho had distinguished himself clearly from other Brazilian writers. His works do not project the tropical opulence. Coelho’s territorial independence has made him the most famous Brazilian Author across the globe. His books have multiple layers of variety and his books are not overly religious. His books carry spiritual message, but the spirituality is untouched by religious fanaticism.

Coelho had used spiritual theme in many shades which features the myriad concepts to guide his protagonists and also reward them later for their quest.

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro; this multi-cultural land nourished him with diverse cultural beliefs. Although his family was a stern believer in Catholicism, Coelho had a stern hatred towards the conventions of his Roman Catholic upbringing, His parents wanted him to be an Engineer, but he could not perform well in school. Later he was enrolled in a law school. But he left his law studies in between and joined the Hippie movement. Coelho had nourished the dream of becoming a writer since his childhood. Coelho was admitted thrice into a mental asylum because his parents believed that he had some psychiatric problem. After leaving his law school in 1976, Coelho travelled to Mexico, South America, North America, Europe and Nepal with the hippie group. This movement led him to travel through different geographies and made him experience the cultures and traditions of countries around the world. This can be referred to as the transition phase for his future life as he experienced the tenderest and harsh incidences of his life. During this time, he was kidnapped and tortured by paramilitaries, he encountered with black magic and drugs. In 1980 he made his way across northern Spain on a pilgrimage Santiago de Compostela. This trip serves as a way to seek discovery and boomeranged him to Catholicism. This trip enabled him to realize and nurture his childhood dream of becoming a world-famous writer. From there his journey of writing is unstoppable till now.

Spiritual and Philosophical themes have always been dominant in his works. Which does not carry a monotony of religion. He told Arias about religion that, "I see it as a group of people who find a collective way to worship; I said worship, not obey. They are two different things. This group of people could worship Buddha, Allah, God, the father of Jesus it does not matter. What matters is that at the moment we connect with mystery, we feel more united, more open to life and we realize we are not alone in the world, that we don't live in isolation. That is religion for me, not a set of rules and orders imposed by others." (*Arias 11-12*)

Coelho had stitched this same adaptability of different religion and spirituality in his works. In *The Alchemist* Santiago learns a lot from his journey to Egypt to find his treasure, Paolo of *Zahir*, Igar of *The Winner Stands Alone*, or Veronica of *Veronica decides to die* or Athena of *Witch of Portobello*, they all undergo the multidimensional spiritual awakening. His work inculcates Oriental, Western, Middle East and Zen spiritual philosophy, which carries the mystical practice of spirituality.

As Coelho writes in his blog

“According to Zen masters we all have an intuitive knowledge of the reason for our existence. But most philosophical or religious teachings are nothing but ways of provoking deep down inside us, the contact with the wisdom, which is already there, buried deep in layers of prejudice, guilt, mental confusion and false ideas about our own importance” (*paulocoelhoblog.com*)

This hybridity of adaptability is reflected in his protagonists. The Scottish Evangelist Henry Drummond stated in natural law in the spiritual world (1803) “No spiritual man can ever claim that his spirituality is his own” (89) His protagonists also confirm this point as they are confronted with challenges and blend their adaptive and contemporary teaching to uplift them spiritually. Thus, it can also be conferred that Coelho concept to feature and mingle different spiritual teachings is related mostly with the concept of faith and this crafts a creative and dynamic approach in his protagonist to achieve their goals. In his works his protagonists always project a rational and justified way to accept and adopt the larger concept of universe. Coelho featured his concepts regarding the soul or the spirit, the divine force, the mystical transcendence, Ecstasy, sufferings and basic human egotism through the aspects of spirituality. These concepts are further linked in complex realities of their life, and he unknots these with various spiritual theories. These mysteries are solved with different religious textual references from different spiritual teachings as the teaching of Buddha, the Hindu Gods, the Bible, the Quran etc. But one thing is very prominent is that their spiritual concepts are not merely combined with their fundamental teachings, but he rather experimented with them beyond textual concepts and

make that experiments with themselves and uplift their power to overcome their obstacles with the help of their spiritual powers. He makes his protagonists aware of their mystical and spiritual power. Which is far beyond their imagination and finally this contemporary concept directs them to interact using both and this they gain the superior spiritual intellect beyond the materialistic approach and interpret the real knowledge.

His protagonists are voyagers, shepherd, writer, explorer, spy, hippie preacher, veteran of Afghan wars. He portrays them as normal or as great achievers and successful writers, they are primarily a seeker looking for unapproachable goal. Some are totally unaware of the world and beyond their extent and some are very familiar with the ethics and extremes of human life. They represent a perfect nexus of ignorance and divinity of wisdom and spiritual adoptability. He confirms this point to Arias regarding the monotony of the sect and their preachings. That, “The only way to escape all that is to understand that the spiritual search is personal responsibility that you can’t transfer and entrust to others. It’s better to make mistakes following omens that your conscience tells you are guiding you than to let others decide your destiny” (*Arias P-11*). His protagonists are those who ventured beyond their certain spiritual limits and traditions. They are actually seekers looking for wholeness. Most of them grew up in a set format of spiritual traditions that are not known to outsiders. These protagonists in either *Veronica Decides to Die* or *Valkyries* or *The Witch of Portobello*. They get positive and gentle encouragement from their guide, The Alchemist or their helpers who have already explored and returned this quest. These protagonists widen their spiritual horizon and realize that the core truth is revealed at the mystic heart of all religion and one hand to adopt it as per their exponential limits. Coelho was an avert reader of the Bhagwad Gita, The Gospels and Lao Tzu, Zen teachings and Buddha preachings. Knowing more than one religion enriched his creativity and thinking. The spiritual consciousness among his protagonists reach a high dimensional prospect. Where the consciousness energy experiences everything, it interacts with and manifest itself into a higher dimension.

Aleph is an example of such nexus of spiritual concepts where Coelho and Tejal met after five hundred years to fill the spiritual holiness which presents in their life. Since many incarnations the concept of *Aleph* is incorporated with contemporary philosophy and Shamanism. Coelho questions his master, “What am I doing here, trying to make my way in a spiritual tradition where roots are in the remote past far from all the challenges of the present moment.” (*Aleph 1*). Coelho in the *Aleph* and in many other works is a dislocated person like Santiago in *Igor* or Athena who are attracted by dislocated people. Every quest is resolved with the help of a partner either Yao, alchemist or Olina. They encounter the quest and obstacle together and utilize their time to figure out the resultant outcome of their struggle in his works. The protagonists are free spirit ‘hybrid’ and are not afraid to go against the norms of societies. They are ever ready to take challenge and enjoy the fringe of the social order.

Hybrid spirituality basically refers to the actual interchange, exchange and mixing of different spiritual beliefs. Joseph Roab describes it as a combination devotion, “in which there is deep catholic devotion but also adherent to other religious models and practices.”

(*Visions and Revisions 256*) This notion permits the inclusion of different forms of religious profiles. Coelho had been an avid reader since his childhood and had traveled a lot before his writings. These two very fundamental aspects of logical thinking had planted a rational outlook towards religion and spirituality. As most of his works are autobiographical this undercurrent theme of hybrid spirituality is an indispensable part of his works. Most of his protagonists do not fit in the ideal frame and such has been the life of Coelho.

Conclusion

The present paper thus, is an effort to justify the connecting of Coelho and his protagonist to elaborate acceptance of spiritual awareness is more than one way. Hybridity of this factor relies on self-awareness which begins with awakened conscience which is activated through struggle self

introspection and finally through reconnecting with the bond of with supreme being. This restoration with supreme being finally resulted in meeting with the self and interconnected group and through this the critical aspects and attributes of spirituality are revealed. This study is an attempt to understand the importance of assimilation of different genre of spirituality to get the elixir of people and harmony. Coelho's protagonists are these spiritual hybrids of bundles of multitude of traditions who always led themselves towards a better version of themselves and also reflects their halo on others to transform them into their positive aspect. The paper is concluded with Coelho's own explanation in his first book *The Pilgrimage*.

“There is no religion that is capable of bringing all the stars together, because if this were to happen the universe would become a gigantic empty space and would lose its reason for existence” (*The Pilgrimage* 93).

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