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Multiculturalism in the Novels of Paulo Coelho

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ABSTRACT

The Present paper is an effort to focus on the concept of multiculturalism in the novels of Paulo Coelho. Paulo Coelho himself is a literary phenomenon that moves “beyond the culture of origin” (Damrosch 197) and has become a permanent resident in the philosophy and logic of readers through his “universal language”. The purpose is to explore Coelho’s rhetorical narrative popularity and to understand his cognitive theory about how readers across the planet belonging to different genres, culture and age relate themselves to his narratives. The diversified cultural phenomenon that projects the contact zones between the reader and Paulo Coelho leads towards the unique cultural hybridization. Most of his works have cosmopolitan characters with cosmopolitan thought process. This hybrid cultural nexus with his readers led Coelho to sold 350 million copies and translations in more than 80 languages. The frequency and wavelength affinity of thoughts and ideas of Paulo Coelho with his readers across the world is not less than a miracle as how come a Brazilian writer ,writing in Portuguese, resonates with people’s logic and emotions .Thus his novels act as cultural bridge between the societies breaking the so called boundaries of nations and engulfing a multicultural aspects of reading and writing.

Key words: Multiculturalism, culture, cosmopolitan, hybrid.

Multiculturalism is a word that describes a society where many different cultures reside together. A multicultural society exists when people from different places, societies and countries migrate to one place and live together in integrity with their culture mingled with the native culture of the migrated land. Thus, it is a concept of giving equal importance and opportunities to all-native or migrant. It is also an example of ethnic pluralism. We also come across the term ‘cultural pluralism’ when we discuss multiculturalism. It is a concept where diverse cultural groups collaborate and enter in an open dialogue with one another and sacrificing their specific identities. So, “Multiculturalism is the co-existence of diverse cultures where culture includes racial, religious, or cultural groups and is manifested in customary behaviors, cultural assumptions and values, patterns of thinking and communicative style”. (ifla.com, “Defining Multiculturalism”)

The present paper is an effort to correlate and magnify the above definition with the projection of multiculturalism in the novels of Paulo Coelho. Coelho justifies his interest in the concept of multiculturalism in an interview that, “For a writer you have to be interested in different cultures, different backgrounds. You are not there to write only about your village. You’re there to show a bit of your village, but also to understand other villages. Like Tolstoy says: everything that happens in a village happens everywhere” (The Talks)

When we talk about multiculturalism-we start from the basic question, what is culture?

“The word come from Latin language ‘cultus’ which means care and from French ‘colere’ which means to ‘till’. (history.as.uky.edu.).

So cultural aspect is the very basic and fundamental aspect of any society. It has many paradigms i.e family, religion, rituals, morality, spirituality, myths, legends, faiths, beliefs, conscience, judgement etc. So, we all fall prey to the cultural identity which in turn relates us to the physical and mental ambiance of the society. So, the personal identity of any individual is often projected as the reflection of their background, the ambiance of their upbringing etc. And all these factors metamorphized to form the structure of thought and personality.

This paper is an attempt to correlate this metamorphic process of ethnic and cosmopolitan pluralism of Paulo Coelho. And the emotional bonding of Coelho's readers with him. These are the people from different backgrounds and diverse cultures going through different phases of life relating themselves with Coelho's philosophy. This nexus is the core reason for the success of Paulo Coelho.

Coelho's special talent seems to be his ability to speak to everyone at once. "The kind of spirituality he espouses is to all corners..... His readers often say that they see their own lives in his own books" (New Yorker)

Thus, Paulo's portrayal of different cultures is an effort and justification of clichés. Whether he or us tried to untangle ourselves in our surroundings either to untangle the differences and hug the non-opinionated opinion. The cultural and religious chaos which is depicted in his novels reveals the imbibement of cultural solvency of different societies which he came through. "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capacity and habits acquired by man as a member of society". (Tylor, *Primitive culture*)

Cultural background thus acts as a prominent catalytic factor in shaping the beliefs of any individual. The impact of family (the firsthand source of culture) which is the basic unit of all human societies differ in some or the other aspects from rest of the native or other genres of societies. But what impact does it often casts? Is it that early life's circumstances often repress to develop an all together different point of view and stagnates the idea of development of any new angle to look at different cultures of the world? The paper tries to rationalize that the influences of early life circumstances does not stagnate the development of poignant literary and cultural creativity of Paulo Coelho. But the diverse cultural impacts and influences rather siphoned the flow of diversity of thoughts and persist the strength to resist the odds in his life.

"Paulo showed the trait of an original way of thinking". (Morais 36). He had always been a man of paradoxes. He is a Brazilian and a Brazilian as per Coelho is someone, "living in a permanent breeding ground, in a mixture of races unique in the world, with African, indigenous Brazilian, Japanese, European influences. It's that mix of thousand things that's taught us Brazilians to be tolerant with the spiritual world, with all the magic that manifests through the basic symbols of music, dance and poetry". (Arias 154)

Coelho's parents wanted him to become an engineer, but he had nourished and nurtured the dream of becoming a writer from his early childhood. And during this transitional phase of shifting his childhood dream with his parents dreams and aspirations, he went through a chaotic *process of physical, mental and psychological trauma. During these years he came across many philosophies of life. He was influenced by many different culture and inputs and became interested in cultures around the world. He had enhanced this impact in most of his works. As he told in an interview that,*

"I had to 'suffer' because it was in front of me. In fact, when I look back I did not suffer. You know? It was just part of my journey. And that brought me here." (Brian Draper)

Paulo Coelho's books have become a sort of universal literature but the place where he was born matters a lot in molding his thoughts and literary aptitude.

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio de Janeiro in a sophisticated upper middleclass family. He was brought up in catholic environment. He led a healthy and normal childhood until he was thirteen. Due to his introvert nature and rebellious attitude against the conventions of his Roman Catholic upbringing he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital by his parents thrice. He was enrolled in a law school at his parents wish and abandoned the dream of becoming a writer. But Coelho dropped out of law school in 1976 and lead a life of Hippie and travelled to South America, Mexico, North America, Europe and onto Nepal. As he told about his tour in the book *Hippie*.

"*Hippie* is above all a road movie about travelling through different geographies. The protagonist leaves looking for personal growth and for that personal growth and for that, experiences a series of events the way traditional heroes do - - - an old love, arrest and torture by paramilitaries, the trip to Amsterdam, an offer to become a drug trafficker, a new one , the Hare Krishna movement, the Sufi, the trip to Nepal -Until he reaches his goal"(Clarín). In 1980, he took trip to Europe and Africa and during this trip he pilgrimed walking the route of Santiago de Compostela ,which is almost 800 kilometers by road .This pilgrimage, and in particular the route from Roncesvalles on the French border, revealed to him that the source of his writing could only be found inside himself. This journey enlightened the belief of Catholicism in Coelho. This transformation resulted in the script of his first book 'O dia'ri'o de um magno(1987). This

book was published as *The Pilgrimage* in 1995. This is also his trajectory leap to Catholicism, which was the cause of his unrest during his teens and youth. This book is also a handbook which discloses Coelho's cultural and religious assimilation wrapped in spirituality. These tours made him realize the versatility of cultures across the different geographies and finally led him to explore the horizons of different cultures and civilizations across the world. "Coelho saw alchemy as the soul of the world and as a part of Jung's collective unconscious through which a person connects to everything". (Arias p48)

Thus, during the process of quenching his soul from the thirst of self-identity, Coelho's personal legend helped him to conquer the world of creativity through his writings and also let him to demonstrate the imbibed diverse culture through his narratives through different characters. These characters either Santiago or Esther or Elijah or Brida or Veronika or Paulo are bundles of autobiographical experiences of Paulo Coelho displaying the traits and experiences of Coelho in his different stages of life. These characters are wrapped in different cultural backgrounds breaking their cocoons (cocoons of struggle, frustration, identity-crisis etc.) and emerging as transformed souls and personality. Taking the reference of different characters in his novels, which are from different regions and backgrounds, the paper also tried to justify that culture in any society is a multilayer process and not everyone living in that closed group of society adopt the culture in unison. Analyzing it broadly may seem the coherent adoption of culture but individually every single person living in a society seems to be an independent and concentrated form of his own cultural aspect. And these single diverse cultural aspects are the depiction of multiculturalism in the novels of Paulo Coelho. Thus, through his characters the impact of collective consciousness is projected and the storyline is infused with the cultural hybridity which was constantly imbibed by Coelho throughout his life while touring.

Displacement of place often led to displacement of thoughts and is also an opportunity to develop new rational concepts and understanding. These things were seen in concreted form in the later years in Coelho's life. But whether it was a partial or a permanent displacement Morality always remain a prominent feature in his works because he himself was in search a perfect moral model of life. And this feature is also deeply contextualized in his works. And morality is also a key feature of all cultures across the world which remain dominant in pre and post- modern era also. Although in post-modern era multiculturalism is more prominent. The post-modern man dresses like the British, eats Italian or Chinese or Indian and he has different brands and he choose according to his taste. The concept of post-modernism society and its culture is oscillating. Friedrik Jameson truly called post-modernism as "cultural logic of great capitalism." (Jameson 1998)

The social and religious chaos which are depicted in his novels reveals the osmosis process of imbibement of cultural solvency of different societies which Coelho came across and which finally led to the filtration of his soul. The concrete deposition of life instances made most of the characters of his novels unable to understand the core ingredient of life and this opaqueness is the biggest hurdle to reach their goal. The catalytic effect of culture, which always helped the protagonists in monitoring his aim helped the reader to understand the effect of cultural metabolism in Coelho's works. This is a universal phenomenon which helped and comprehend the readers to grasp this reverberating form of transcending and evolving cultural beliefs in any society. The research is also an effort to correlate this reverberation of resembling and contrasting cultural beliefs and myths prevailing throughout the journey of the protagonists of Coelho. These characters not only carry their own beliefs but also resonate the voice of readers across the world.

The major cultures and religions which are depicted in the works of Paulo Coelho are Arab, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hare Krishna movement. His quest for the exploration of the moral web often led him to frame his characters in any of the above given religious background. And during exploration of the soul the understanding of these philosophies helped him to untangle the moral and cultural web in search of their answers. As every question vary from each protagonist the understanding of different cultures usually proved helpful to reach their destination.

In *The Alchemist*, Santiago travels from Spain to Egypt in search of his treasure, In *The Pilgrimage*, Paulo tours a road pilgrimage to France and Spain. In *The Fifth Mountain*, Elijah's journey to the Fifth Mountain, In *The Winner Stands Alone*, Igor travel from Russia to Cannes, In *The Zahir*, Paulo travels Paris to Kazakhstan. Thus it is seen that a lot of his works have Arabic or Islamic background, terms, settings, words, characters, location and cultural forces. Though he himself is from Brazil and writes in Portuguese, he justifies his clinch towards Arabic culture as, "Yes, I am from Brazil, I write in Portuguese but I was always fascinated by the Arab culture".

(Amina Chaudhary)

Coelho once said, “I believe that the strength of influencing people come from the freedom contained in each one of us- whether Muslim, Arab, Western, Eastern or Latin”.

Coelho’s religious and cultural aspirations and explorations ranged from mysticism to monotheism were well accepted in the western world and he became something of a literary guru of cosmopolitan culture. Coelho went through several phases of soul searching, reading, following and imbibing the relics of different religions and cultures in the world. And these diverse effects of Arab, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism and yoga are the vibrant features of his works.

In one of his Interviews with Hindustan Times, Paulo Coelho told them that although he had never visited India yet Indian culture has been a huge influence on both himself and western philosophy. He also told about how he has been critically influenced by Rabindranath Tagore. He also quoted a few lines from the *Gitanjali* at the beginning of *Hippie*, saying “poetry is another way of seeing the world. These days people don’t pay enough attention to poetry. By quoting Tagore at the beginning of the book, I wanted to bring back attention to his work”. (Priya Bala)

Thus, the paper concentrates on the blend of cultural attitude in the writer which is so often projected in his novels. More-over this cultural attitude is more inclined towards the awareness of self-worth. The religious motive for knowing oneself is less dominant than knowing one’s self -worth regarding the contemporary cultural beliefs. And this aspect helps the readers towards self -improvement. To convey his universal message Coelho portrays his protagonists and characters as shepherd, priests, common man, prostitutes, children and himself. He as a supporter of multiculturalism blend the values from Buddhism, Hinduism, Zionism, Christianity and Islam with his philosophy to cherish and to bear the real delight to his readers. To achieve this motif he nicely applies concrete symbols and abstracts to relate his contemporary philosophy with various disciplines like history, geography, theology, philosophy, mythology, science and culture. “The author uses ‘pastiche’ from the various works of previous writers and religious books including the Bible, the Holy Quran, the Bhagwat Gita”. (Afsana Mousume)

Paulo Coelho’s work can be studied under Latin American Literature, which consists of literature written in several language like Spanish and Portuguese. It compasses the national literature of South and Central Mexico, Cuba Puerto Rico and other parts of West Indies. These facts and figures can do proper justice for the concept of multiculturalism in his works.

As Stritch explained, “a work becomes world literature when it has to offer something to the world without which the overall spirit of humanity would not become complete, when its roots are finally embedded in the soil of the nation yet its crown reaches high into the space of external humanity when it is fed by the blood of the nation yet it is infused with the spirit of general humanity”

As a Brazilian writer with cosmopolitan outlook, Coelho becomes a writer of diverse cultures. Coelho had applied the techniques of ‘magic realism’ as his narrative strategy in his work. Coelho had imbibed his narration with archetypal quest as his concentration is on transgressing boundaries and multi-cultural worlds. The topic has been analyzed from the different angles as collective unconscious theory of Carl Jung along with the concept of cultural politics underlying the ideology of representation of basic and complex cultural prospects in his works and also the creative cultural diaspora which he grasped during his tours. As most of Coelho’s novels are based on sociological approach depicting a monotonous or integrated society of hybrid culture, the boundary less vicinity of imagination thus adopts it all in its true form. In most of his novels the protagonist is portrayed as standing at the crossroads between various ancient cultures either Santiago, Paulo, Brida, or Igor. All these characters are simultaneously intersected by Christian, Herbraic, Arabian or Buddhist philosophy. But ultimately the character had to choose his destiny as per his or her circumstances or life lessons and define his own personal legend. This is what the paper wants to justify. The paper concludes with the point that “Coelho sees the world with Brazilian eyes and his eyes are those of the world”.

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