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CONFLICT BETWEEN MATERIALISM AND SPIRITUALISM IN PAULO COELHO'S 'THE WINNER STANDS ALONE'

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Abstract- Spirituality means the quest to know one's true Self, to find out the real nature of consciousness. This search is the foundation of all great spiritual teachings, the goal of all great mystics. Paulo Coelho's novels basically deal with the spiritual journey of his protagonists. This journey at some points is hindered by some factors and leads to the moral downfall of the protagonists. His novel 'The Winner Stands Alone' portrays the importance of morality or rather lack of morality in the pursuit of the materialistic dreams. The novel portrays a character that has already reached his material destination and ignores the spiritual aspect of life by perusing false ideals. The novel depicts a conflict between materialism prevalent in the modern world and the spiritual aspect of life that man neglects while perusing false ideals.

Key words- spiritualism, materialism, superclass, humanity

The spirit being the vital principle is said to be that aspect which gives meaning, purpose, and direction to human life. The very nature of mankind, therefore, gets to be regarded as inherently spiritual. Spirituality means the quest to know one's true Self, to find out the real nature of consciousness. This search is the foundation of all great spiritual teachings, the goal of all great mystics. The search of the Self sets a person free from the fears that makes him uneasy. It is a state of one's psychological wellbeing, a state of inner silence and a state of boundless joy. In short it is a state of enlightenment.

The etymological roots of the word spirituality evolve as a term derived from "spirit" which has developed from the Greek word *Pneuma* meaning "breath" or "breeze." Apart from the etymological roots, spirituality means faith, a complete surrender or a belief in a power that goes by the Great Spirit, a Higher power, God, Goodness etc. (Shivpriya p 151)

As per the definition in Encyclopedia Britanica, spirituality is the quality or state of being spiritual or of being attached to or concerned with religious questions and values broadly conceived. The term is also frequently used in a non- (or even anti-) religious sense to designate a preoccupation with or capacity for understanding fundamental moral, existential, or metaphysical questions, especially regarding the nature of the self (or soul, or person), the meaning of life, the nature of mind or consciousness, and the possibility of immortality.

Paulo Coelho's novels basically deal with the spiritual journey of his protagonists. This journey at some points is hindered by some factors and leads to the moral downfall of the protagonists. However, if these factors are recognized at the right time and the path of the journey is modified accordingly, one can still reach the goal. Human beings are by nature spiritual and the spiritual dimension provides ability to transcend the limits of self. To have a real and significant spiritual life one needs to recognize honestly that the spiritual life is essentially a life

of personal relations with men and with God and should act accordingly. The modern materialistic way of life is proving to be one of the major obstacles in the spiritual journey of the soul.

Paulo's protagonists undertake a quest for understanding the meaning of their lives. Most of his protagonists follow a way that leads them to their destination. However, his novel 'The Winner Stands Alone' stands in contrast with his other novels as it portrays a character that has already reached his material destination and ignores the spiritual aspect of life by perusing false ideals. The novel published in 2008 portrays the importance of morality or rather lack of morality in the pursuit of the materialistic dreams human are obsessed about. Commenting on the present civilization in an interview with Anupama Bhattacharya, Paulo says:

"We are at a crossroad. Since spirituality is going to play an important role during the next century, we have two choices: either we go towards fundamentalism or towards tolerance. I am preaching tolerance, but this is a long fight, and it depends how people behave here and now."

In the preface to the novel Paulo says that in the novel three of the four main characters allow their dreams to be manipulated:

Igor, a Russian millionaire, who believes that killing is acceptable if it is done for a good reason, such as alleviating human suffering or getting back the woman he loves.

Hamid, a fashion magnate, who started out with the best of intentions only to be caught up in the very system he was trying to use.

Gabriela, who –like most people today, is convinced that fame is an end in itself, the ultimate reward in a world that considers celebrity to be the supreme achievement. Nevertheless, it is also a story about several other characters who try to be a part of the *Superclass*, Coelho's term for the people of power.

In the beginning of the novel Coelho talks about the towering influence the *Superclass* in the materialistic world on the common people. He says that just when everything seems to be in order and as families gather round the table to have supper, the phantom of the *Superclass* appears, selling impossible dreams: luxury, beauty, power. And the family falls apart. He says:

"The father works overtime to be able to buy his son the latest trainers because if his son doesn't have a pair, he'll be ostracized at school. The wife weeps in silence because her friends have designer clothes and she has no money. Their adolescent children, instead of learning the real values of faith and hope, dream only of becoming singers or movie stars. Girls in provincial towns lose any real sense of themselves and start to think of going to the big city, prepared to do anything, absolutely anything, to get a particular piece of jewellery. A world that should be directed towards justice begins instead to focus on material things, which, in six month's time will be worthless and have to be replaced." (12)

In the novel, Paulo makes spot on observations about the modern, materialistic ways of life where people are so engrossed in their occupations that they forget the true meaning of life. He writes:

"People are never satisfied. If they have a little, they want more. If they have a lot, they want still more. Once they have more, they wish they could be happy with little, but are incapable of making the slightest effort in that direction." (39)

Igor discovers that he is suffering from an illness that was fairly common among those who had achieved something. When he realizes that he has become a compulsive worker; he decides to go to a psychiatrist. According to the psychiatrist, workaholics run the risk of becoming depressed when not immersed in the challenges and problems of running a company. Paulo says:

"The gravest consequence is the damage it causes to family life. In Japan, one of the countries where the illness is most common and where the consequences are sometimes fatal, they've developed various ways of controlling the obsession."

What the psychiatrist suggests to Igor is the way one should look at work. He tells him that work should be used as a source of happiness and not as a compulsion. Paulo further makes an important comment on human life:

“Life has its reasons. We are all of us linked and often it’s necessary to cut out the malignant tumors so that the rest of the body can remain healthy. People are locked up in their selfish little worlds; they make plans that don’t include their fellow man; they believe the planet in simply land to be exploited; they follow their instincts and desires and care nothing for the collective well-being of society.”(178)

Igor did not intend to destroy his family, he simply wanted to leave the world a better place for the children he dreamed of having a world without drugs of wars or people-trafficking, a world in which love would be the great force uniting all couples, peoples, nations and religions. Paradoxically, he destroyed his family in the effort of making it happy. His wife left him because while running the rat race for success, he hadn’t been able to understand her feelings. She seems to be saying:

“We are all part of the divine spark. We all have a purpose in creation and that purpose is called Love. That love, however, shouldn’t be concentrated in just one person, it should be scattered throughout the world, waiting to be discovered. Wake up to that love. What is gone cannot return. What is about to arrive needs to be recognized.” (191)

Paulo contemplates on this sorry state of affairs in the modern life. When he tries to probe into the problem finds that values of the modern world have changed. He thinks:

“The world we live, we are being suffocated by lies, encouraged to put our faith in science rather than in spiritual values and to feed our souls with the things society tells us are the important, when in reality, we’re slowly dying because we know what’s going on around us, that we’re being forced to do things we never planned to do, and yet even so, are incapable of giving it all up and devoting our days and nights to true happiness, to family, nature, love” (103)

Conclusion: Paulo Coelho in his novel ‘The Winner Stands Alone’ has presented a conflict between materialism prevalent in the modern worlds and the spiritual aspect of life that he neglects while perusing false ideals. Ultimately, the life of Igor represents a need to recognize the value of happiness that results from true love for humanity and not from the materialistic gains.

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