

Paulo Coelho's Vision of Feminine Element and Emphasizing the Feminist Divinity Concept

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Abstract

Actually, the feminine element is vital in Paulo Coelho's literary forms which can be reverberated conspicuously as the part played in his life. He states that women have an important position and keep to gain a significant part in his life, and he said "my own life is ruled by feminine ability". (Coelho: *Confessions of a Pilgrim*, 83). Two of his books are entitled with female names: *Brida* (1990) and *Veronica Decides to Die* (1998) where the female characters are essential, but in this study, the main concern will be about the feminist divinity concept in particular two novels; (*The Witch of Portobello*) and (*By the River Piedra*

I Sat down and Wept, 1994), where Paulo Coelho emphasizes that there is a feminine part of God, which is named after the mother Goddess.

In addition to that, this paper refers briefly to Paulo Coelho's vision of aspects of feminism and how he represents and employs the feminine elements in some of his novels like (*Brida*, *The devil and Miss Pryme*), and (*Alchemist*). That vision he expresses of women and what they depict within and outside of us can be noticed clearly in his books. In the two novels, (*By Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*) and (*The Witch of Portobello*), Coelho highlights the concept of feminist divinity (the feminine part of God) that seems not to be thought or believed by people at that time, so, this paper will examine this concept precisely in the two novels in order to find out how Coelho viewed and believed the feminine part of God and how he portrayed it through the protagonists of these two novels in the narration.

Keywords: Feminist, Divinity, Mother Goddess, Belief, Vision

Introduction

On 24 August 1947, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Paulo Coelho was born. At the beginning of his career, he worked as a theater actor and then a director, but after that, he devoted his life completely to literature. One of the best works of Coelho to disclose his feminine side is by *Piedra I sat down and wept*, which he wrote from the perspective of a woman. So, this research will emphasize specifically on the concept of feminist divinity (the feminine face of god) in the two selected novels of Coelho as it mentioned in the title above and the vision of women generally in his other novels. There are some connected words to the theme of feminist divinity like belief, vision, and the mother Goddess.

The feminist divinity is a new concept that Coelho involved, particularly in the above mentioned two novels. He strongly believed and emphasized the feminist divinity in his

works and interviews.” In two centuries, I think that feminine divinity will no more be a taboo... I believe in dreams, in man and in the goddess”. Coelho means by the feminist divinity, his belief in the female face of God or the mother goddess who is the manifestation of the Virgin Mary. Now the researcher can explain the female face of God and how the author utilized it within the characters of his two novels;(*The Witch of Portobello*) and then (*By the River Piedra I Sat Down*).

In the first novel, Athena is the heroine who is since childhood has a strong religious connection in seeing the saints and angels and once she told her mother seeing a woman dressed in white as the Virgin Mary as she told to “see the virgin in a white dress” (Coelho, 26). Athena, grew up to believe strongly in the virgin as a manifestation of God and named her by the mother Goddess in different contexts. In fact, the entire *Witch of Portobello* story revolves and centers on the theme of mother Goddess or feminist divinity. After Athena’s divorce, she went Catholic Church for communion, but she was refused, this makes her reject Christianity and to search of her birth mother, which leads her on a journey into the esoterica of Goddess spirituality. Later, Athena taught an actress about spirituality, and said that this as a portion of an elaborated talk on coming back to Goddess worship: "we are coming back to the dogma of the Great Mother. The Greeks called her Gaia...." (Coelho, 156). Athena became a channel for the "Mother" (named here *Hagia Sophia*, which means "Holy Wisdom"). After this, Athena became a divisive spiritual leader in London and she became an omniscient goddess called *Hagia Sophia* interrupted by a Protestant protest.

In the second novel, Pillar’s lover travelled abroad to study in seminary for almost ten years, he came across many religious and cultural concepts to become attached strongly in his beliefs and thoughts. The most significant and unfamiliar concept to people and society is the feminine face of God or the Goddess, Pillar’s lover taught it to his beloved as well as his people and society. The feminine face of God as he explained it means there are two sides of

the God face masculine and feminine, the God and the Goddess. Pillar's sweet heart believes in virgin is the other feminine face of God who named her the goddess in different contexts. "She (the virgin) is the feminine face of God". "She (virgin) has her own divinity". (Coelho, 66). The lover of pillar emphasized the notion of feminism and the equality of men and women totally and raised it up to a higher level of holiness of the belief in the feminist divinity, which he depicts both men and women are the image of God, which means the belief in the feminine face of God, who called it the Goddess, "One of the faces of God is the face of a woman". ((Coelho, 68)).

These above quoted lines by the author Coelho, which are written in the narration for the character Athena to confirm the Goddess mother and the feminist divinity concept. As well, there are some quoted lines from the text to support the notion and concept of the feminist divinity of this study. "We don't think that God created the world. We think that God is the universe, and that we are included in him and he is in us... However, in my viewpoint, we have to call 'him' 'Goddess' or 'Mother'" (Coelho, 126). In addition to that, Coelho confirmed this feminist divinity in one of his question and answer conversations that he said Q. How would you summarize the main topic of your latest novel, *The Witch of Portobello*?

Obviously, it is not easy to summarize a book, but I would say that it goes around the awakening of the female energy in both women and men, as well as the belief of people and the feminist divinity. Really, the belief in this concept seems rather something not familiar or known in the medium of people and society at that time of emerging and believing in this divinity of women of the author's protagonists in the two novels who are Pillar's lover and Athena. Although the feminist divinity which can be interpreted from the view of Coelho as the female face of god or the goddess mother was not realized or known by the people or society of the protagonists who are believers by this concept but they taught their close friends and spread it widely to the extent of people and society and they succeeded in

teaching and convincing them by the female divinity. This actually happened after the protagonists of the two novels, Athena and Pillar's lover took a long spiritual journey to across their hometowns to other countries to study in seminary as Pillar's lover character did for ten years and connected to the nature and teachers of spirituality to learn some rituals like dance as in the example of Athena character who said about dance, it makes the spirit free of fear and worry as well brings the peace to mind. All these spiritual experiences of the protagonists, they got and learned them on their journey of searching the truth, they reached to the strong belief of the feminist divinity which Virgin Mary is the manifestation of God and they depicted her as the Goddess or the feminine face of God.

Coelho's Vision of Women

Plainly, it is so clear in Paulo Coelho views, perspectives, beliefs in the variety of his work such as novels, articles, interviews, and so on, the focus of women element mainly. He paid much attention to this issue by regarding that all his life is controlled by feminine energy as well Coelho sees the women occupied and still occupy fundamental space in his life. These acknowledgments of the author mentioned above as quotations in the abstract of this study. Coelho stressed particularly in these two selected novels of this search on very high holy spiritual concept which is the feminine divinity (the female face of god or the goddess mother) and he utilized this concept in his two main characters of Athena and Pillar's lover to use and believe it strongly as well as explain and spread it further to all their friends and people in the community. By this way, Coelho employed his vision of women and the feminist divinity in forms of literary works as these two novels, which their main theme and notion centered on this concept and in some interviews to say "In two centuries, I think that feminine divinity will no more be a taboo. I would say that Athena is my feminine side. My decision is for anything that I have to do in this life. So, if I see this presence of the feminine

face of God around instead of trying to follow what the Catholic Church says, I should be more open". ([http://paulocoelhoblog.com/2007/02/13/qa/.](http://paulocoelhoblog.com/2007/02/13/qa/))

Paulo Coelho's vision of women is clearly shown in his writings to involve them in applying this vision in which two novels entitled by the names of women, they are Brida and Veronica decide to die in addition to that in some other novels of Coelho the women are main characters or heroines for instance, *By Piedra I Sat Down And Wept*, *Alchemist*, *The Devil And Miss Pryme*, and *The Witch Of Portobello*.

Now, the research goes to analyze and highlight the aspects of feminism in Brida particularly. The author uses the character Brida to express feminine things inside him, Coelho used the female character in this novel to be the heroin of this journey to take all the adventures and risks in order to fulfill her goal, reach her destiny and seek herself. As the researcher goes through the novel it can be seen the feminine aspects in the events of the story that the desire of Brida becoming a witch and to learn magic which makes her to go to the forest and meet the two teachers of magic, (Magus and Wicca) Brida asked her teacher Magus what's magic? He said "magic is a bridge that permits you to transfer from the visible world over into the invisible world and to understand the lessons of both those worlds". (Coelho, 16). Wicca, the other teacher taught Brida about magic and said "when you set off along the path of magic, the first thing you do is surrender yourself to a greater power, for you will encounter things that you will never understand"((Coelho, 124)). According to this process of learning magic that was taken by Brida in the forest with her teachers, we can notice that the freedom level of Brida, she had to go and pursue the dream and the will she liked to get. This journey of Brida, which is free of any social, traditional, family restrictions, this makes a sense of the researcher and the readers that a feminism practices and applies freely and flexibly without any kind of masculine objection or confusion.

The other attitude in this novel shows for us the freedom and flexibility of the female (Brida) in choice and taking a decision, in the narration of the text when Brida was torn in her feelings between the two lovers Magus, (her teacher) and Lorens (her boyfriend) who sometimes saw them both as soul mates, but eventually she chose Lorens to be her real soul mate and lover forever as well as to keep respect for her teacher Magus forever.

In (*Alchemist*) novel, the researcher refers to the feminine side in the character Fatima, although this story doesn't concern mainly of woman's adventures or their specific journeys of self-discovery like other novels but the woman (Fatima) plays an important role in the male protagonist's journey. We can notice this through Fatima's motivation and encouragement towards Santiago to go on in his journey to fulfill his dream. Actually though the protagonist journey in search of the treasure, he travelled from place to another till he reached the dessert and met Fatima, they fall in love each other which created some sense in the protagonist Santiago to discontinue his journey anymore but here the role of woman Fatima was so positive to tell him, she will keep up her love till he achieves his dream and returns back. This speech can be reflected as Fatima said in the text of a novel and I am a part of your dream, a part of your destiny, as you call it. "That's why I want you to continue toward your goal." (Coelho, 50).

This feminine role which Fatima played in this case is one of the main reasons to push Santiago to fulfill his personal legend by reaching to Egyptian pyramids and getting the treasure eventually. In the novel of the devil *And Miss Prym*, one of the major characters is the woman Pryme Chantal, who played a vital role in the story as feminine side. The protagonist's name is the stranger or Carlos, whose family was killed brutally by some terrorists or criminals without any clear reason, made him feel by torture and entered in a state of personal conflict of thought whether people in essence are good or bad. This led the stranger to take a journey to Viscose village and planned to offer them gold if the people

could murder anyone in the village. The stranger only told the barmaid (Chantal Pryme) about his plan. Now, within the narration, we observed that the feminine side represented in Chantal Pryme who was seduced in the beginning of the offer of gold that she could travel to another city to live prosperous and better life as she dreamed since childhood. In this case Chantal entered a state of conflict between good and evil.

The stranger actually informed her to tell the Viscose village about this offer of gold and Chantal did, the people with Chantal decided to kill the old woman in their village because she became useless, later on, the far side of village when they pulled up the old woman to the place of action to shoot her, Chantal Pryme intervened and stopped them to kill the old lady and she informed and clarified to the people this bad action of committing a crime would make Viscose people as criminals, violins and bad in nature at the stranger's view. Later on, they stopped doing that and returned to their places. Now at this point, Chantal Pryme got triumphed over her bad thought and greediness to become good in thought and nature. Also, it can be seen the positive attitude of the female side (Chantal Pryme) in drawing a good picture of her and her people to convince and prove to the stranger that not all the people are bad in nature and can be good in nature.

But the stranger's doubt and torture in missing his family wouldn't change his view of seeing the people well, even after his plan to Viscose people declared that the people couldn't kill in return for money. So, the stranger was still keeping his point of view of the people like it's said in this text "In the end the stranger must admit that the people are neither good nor evil, the people are just people." (<http://allreaders.com/book-review-summary/the-devil-and-miss-prym-39057>). Then, Chantal Pryme said to him as in the text of novel "You are not trying to find the answer to a question, you are simply trying to confirm something you desperately want to believe; that everyone is evil." (Coelho, 80).

Conclusion

In this study, the researcher attempted to focus mainly on the concept of feminist divinity in the two specific novels, *The Witch of Portobello* and *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*. He explained how the feminist divinity (the female face of God or the mother Goddess) is believed by the author Coelho and his protagonist characters in the narration of the two novels of this study. In addition to that, the study mentioned briefly Paulo Coelho's vision of the feminine aspects in some of his novels and how Coelho represented and employed the feminine elements in these novels. This paper also could show some related words to the concept of feminist divinity which is explained and discussed earlier like, belief, vision, and the mother Goddess.

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