

A STUDY OF SUSTAINING INTIMACY WITH GOD AS A SYMBOL OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IN *BY THE RIVER PIEDRA I SAT DOWN AND WEPT*

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ABSTRACT

*Ever since the creation of Man and consequently evolution of Faith on earth, theologians, philosophers, scholars, writers and common man have been interpreting the reality i.e. God according to their own personal experiences and requirement of the time and age in which they lived. In today's world, one of the most controversial ideas is the doctrine of faith as true aspirant of God's love. Many consider that God is their personal legacy and many think that He lives beyond their traditional horizons. This idea about God's intimacy has caused inter sects and inter religion discourses as well. Nevertheless, one thing has been assured in the selected text that human beings beyond the restriction of race, religion and creed, have been striving to maintain closeness with God and whether interpreted and called in any condition, is always Benevolent and Benign to believers. This research paper attempts to analyze this doctrine and consequently explores its implications, propositions and connotations in Paulo Coelho's novel *By the River Piedra I Sat down and Wept* (1999) in the backdrop of new criticism. Close reading technique has been used to analyze the text of the novel. The researchers have tried to find out themes, relations, characters, incidents and ideas and symbols in the text that convey the presence of the idea that God is the symbol of unwavering love and always benign to believes. The study sums up that human faith beyond its religion, social and traditional attachment is the true aspirant of God's love in all sorts of crises and difficulties and God in spite of various names and connotation associated with Him is always benign and kind to the believers.*

Keywords: Faith, Believer, Holy Spirit, Divine. Benevolence, Human Efforts, Love, Feminine Face, Benign

INTRODUCTION

The idea about God has caused inter sects and inter religion discourses in all the divine religions. There are different schools of thought who have different opinion regarding God, whether it is Islam, Christianity or Judaism. Similarly, there are differing concepts of God. Trinity (The Christian God), Unity (The God of Islam), the God of Philosophers, the God of Reformers and the God of Mystics.

Sufi Doctrines like Wahdat ul wujud are closely related to the concepts of New Agers. New Agers believe that all is One and everything is God and God is everything. They also believe in Man's perfection and divinity and think that he can create his own reality. The fact that God is in everything also enhances the status of man. Since man is essentially divine, perfect, and has infinite prospective, therefore; he lives in a time which is not linear but extra terrestrial. Another belief common among New Agers is closely related the Hindu concept of reincarnation, the belief that the soul lives again into a new body after the death of someone, to continue spiritual evolvement. For them the resurrection and the rebirth is just the same as reincarnation. They argue that the early church censored the doctrine of rebirth and covered up its teaching.

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In theology, the theologian also did not leave themselves behind. Some tried to prove god with logic and reason and some has been doubtful about His existence even..... when some tried to prove God statistically the other denied its existence at all whereas some were agnostic and some skeptics.

The emergence of these concepts and doctrines has led to many influential readings and has made its way in literature as well. When theology often strives to comprehend God by dull and abstract terms, religious intellectuals Karen Armstrong (1999) in *A History of God* has tried the same in the perspectives of history. According to her the history of God has been ardent and passionate. The prophets of Israel experienced the reality of God in agonizing struggle, physical pain, and stress. The western concept of god was particularly shocking. The monotheists, she argues further, used *imagery* to express their personal experiences of the reality i.e., God which we don't find in orthodox theology. The revised interest in mythology, she says, is a recent development which is the result of a widespread interest for a more imaginative expression of religious truths. In this regard, the popular work of Joseph Campbell (2001) can be presented as one of the relevant examples. Joseph Campbell linked ancient Myths and those still prevalent in the traditional societies by exploring the long-lasting mythology of mankind. He nullified the assumption the divine religion i.e., Christianity, Judaism and Islam are all devoid of mythology and poetic symbolism. On the other hand, mystics have seen God incarnated in a woman. Others reverently speak about God's sexuality and have introduced a female element into the divine. However, the thought or discourse that God is a male, while the other challenged that God is a female or male and female both, is comparatively modern and new age phenomenon.

The idea about the gender of God emerges out of the fact (thought) that all divine religions are masculine. Prophets, rasuls, saints, priest and mullah are mostly males. Whereas in mythological religions like that of ancient Greeks and Hinduism there are so many goddesses, deities and devis, though ordinary women are considered inferior in these religions as well.

The conservative theological scholars consider it wrong and implausible from the biblical point of view and it is considered one of the most diabolical doctrines promoted by the New Agers (The doctrine regarding the femininity of God is usually attributed to the New Agers) and theological liberals. They think and idea of feminine side of god is sinister because God is Clearly Our Father God. They believe that creation of women is is a reflection of mans need and not God's nature. Kenneth and Gloria Copeland (1991) have described while challenging the concept about the feminine face of God, in their book *From Faith to Faith* as following:

People has even Argued about whether god is male or female. But the Bible itself tells us that He is both.... In the Hebrew language, all words have gender. They are either male or female. But the Hebrew word 'Jehovah' is both masculine and feminine. He is as much female as He is male.... Originally, mankind was the way too. When God first made 'man', he was as much a female as was male. Then God separated the female part out and 'wo-man' or 'the man with womb'. After that man and woman had to come together to be perfectly whole. (p.94)

Whatever the reason is but one thing is crystal clear that human beings have been constantly making efforts to search God and establish close intimacy with God. They never deviated from the benevolence and benignity of God and on the other hand God has never disappoint the believers who maintain faith in his existence. To find this relation between God and the believers is the main goal of this study.

In this novel, Paulo Coelho has given an acceptable alternative to the common understanding of religion by combining the religion and feminine spirits in his novel. He has challenged the masculine tone prevailing in the religions all over the world. He has also challenged the traditional religious concepts by combining God, religion and carnal love in a single work of fiction. *By the river Piedra I sat Down and wept* continues to be one of the major textual sites for the discussion of feminine aspect of God that is termed as the unwavering love of God like the unconditional love of mother for her child. God is considered as a symbol of mothers like love. In this context, human being have been working to find faith and love of God and on the other hand God is always found benign to the believers. The selected novel reveals a story in which God has been presented as the symbol of love like the love of a mother. By encountering the female face of God and Her force, who teaches her to open herself to love, Pillar comes out of her confusion regarding either to hold her love or walk away from it. The same battle is going inside her childhood friend, the battle to decide between love and God. It is the Female face of God, the Holy Spirit who understands because she had also loved so greatly, and She agrees to the course taken by her son. She never loses her faith in God and always regards Him kind and benevolence. All these ideas are analyzed in the novel in the light of new criticism.

New Criticism is an American literary movement. The term was first used by Joel Spingarn in an address at Columbia University on "The New Criticism". The address was a manifesto of New Criticism. When John Crow Ransom published *The New Criticism* (1979), the term came in general use. He was the key figure in the movement. In his book he preferred the ontological criticism. He said that the work is self-referential object, and it should not be study like readers response. He emphasized on the structure of the work and asserted that it should not be separated from its meaning because both give unity to the work. He stressed on special attention to be paid to images and symbols. The factors contributed its rise were like great dissatisfaction both in England and America with recent literary tradition. With the development of science, there was social change, but literary criticism was immune from these significant changes. Old moral tradition was hurdle in the way of literary criticism and critical development. So, the movement was more like a revolt against these primitive concepts. At that time all the concentration was given to the author and his background rather than his work and creation. So, this dissatisfaction led to a new way of critical thinking.

Statement of the Problem

Search of truth and God has always been the aim of human experience in pursuit of spirituality and discovery of true self. Many scholars and theologians think that is beyond human accesses. The idea becomes quite fascinating when Paulo Coelho suggest that it is quite possible if we could formulate an angle to look beyond the traditionally oriented horizon of faith and religion. This study is interesting in this context because it redefines spiritual faith and rediscovers sustaining human efforts to crake open the hearts to find unconditional love of God like the unwavering love of mother. The paper also explores symbolic traits of benevolence and benignity of God towards the believers and presents it as true heritage of unshaken human faith in God depicted in *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* in the backdrops of new criticism.

Research Objectives

i. To examine various efforts of human being in sustaining true faith in God as depicted in *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*.

ii. To analyze God as symbol of unwavering love and kindness as portrayed in *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*.

Research Questions

i. What are various human efforts that Paulo Coelho appreciate in sustaining true faith in God as portrayed in *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*?

ii. How does Paulo Coelho portray God as a symbol of unwavering love and kindness as depicted *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*?

Significance of the Study

This study is noteworthy in creating trust among the believes in truth of their spiritual experience. It highlights the most crucial condition of human efforts by giving voice to human personal experiences instead of waiting for traditional consolations in maintaining faith during the hardships of losses and crises, soul and body, prayers and meditation and ideal and reality. It helps readers sheds off the tradition spells about God and supports strengthening of spiritual practices in human beings that can created integrated and composed human community. The paper also presents an excellent dialogue between God and his believer in pursuit of acceptance and recognition of true love and kindness of God. In Pakistani society, now a days many distrusts and disappointment exists, this paper helps restore optimism and believe in God's miracles and provides comfort and harmony in pursuit of a peaceful communal order.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The paper deals with the most widely discussed and debated doctrine of God's love for believers and efforts of the human beings to search the benevolence of God who has been as symbol of true love of mother in the text. New Criticism analyzes the text as a whole to find meaning therefore, the researcher used this theory to develop a conceptual framework for the analyses of the selected text.

In this regard, T. E Holmes'(1990) speculation is regarded important work for the critics. He says that the poetry is an organic unity the whole cannot be understood until the parts are not elaborated. He further asserts that images are not only for decoration, but they are the real essence of poetry.

Psychologists also supported the ideas of this school of thought. George Watson also appreciated the textual study of poem unaffected by any social, political and historical background all

these critics were against the moral stress of Victorians. Similarly, Cleanth Brooks (1947) raises the fundamental questions, "What does the poem communicate? It is not that the poem communicates nothing. Precisely the contrary, the poem communicates so much and communicates it so richly and with such delicate qualifications that the thing communicated is mauled and distorted if we attempt to convey it by any vehicle less subtle than that of the poem itself (P. 69). He lodges a new idea of criticism. His contribution realized readers that linguistic expression of work is worthwhile, and it widens the vision of readers and gives them real insight to understand a literary piece of work. As for as the other basic principles of New Criticism are concerned the body and structure of the work are considered center of the attention and textual study of the work is preferred without any reference to the social set up of the age.

Exclusively, a "poem communicates so much and so richly that the thing communicated is distorted if one conveys it through other factors except the poem itself" (Butler, 2006, P. 3). In this school of thought the moral, religious, social, political and economic conditions are considered irrelevant and real obstacle in the way of understanding a work of literature. Further, they study a literary piece of work alone and do not consider any literary theory a worthwhile for their analysis. They are unhampered by the stress of any other literary movement of that era taking a work as a whole in itself. F.R Leavis is not entirely a new critic, but his close analysis of the poem itself give rise to a new idea of "the words on the page" (1960, p. 17). He elaborates that a poem should be self-sustaining (Its reason for being should exist only inside texts and meaning) make him important to new criticism. He is of the opinion that a work has both text and form they should be studied together to procure the true meaning of the work.

In this mode of criticism words, images, meters, symbol, constitutions, structures and patterns are closely studied and their interconnection and organization are analyzed. Butler (2006) believes that poetry should express something personal about the poet and the poet should be emotionally involved with the poem and create links among various ideas and objects they signify. In other words, symbols must be noticed and created to give bring factual clarity to the meaning. This idea is incorporated in this paper and God is taken as symbol of unconditional love of mother for her child and analyzed as feminine entity. Symbolism is an important topic in new criticism. God is considered as the symbol of love in this paper. David M. Rasmussen (1974) writes that a "Symbol be considered as something more than interpretative vehicle employed for its communication. Secondly, most contemporary interpretation of symbol, many argue that almost everything is capable of becoming a symbol, and further, that in history of mankind almost everything in the sphere of human experience has been symbolized" (p. 64). The paper recount human experience in search of true love of God that why God is used as symbol of love.

Words are examined how they act and react against each other how they express emotions and feelings their significance is closely observed. In this regard I. A Richards's behavior of words is a best approach. This idea is known as the meaning of meaning, principles of literary criticism and practical criticism. One of the essential elements found in these works is Richards's concept that poetry is psychological and not cognitive. Richards also pays a great deal of attention to the use of language in poetry.

Cleanth Brooks also points out that there is only work to interpret all of its constituent elements and the manner in which the elements combine to form the whole, critic can criticize it according to what the work itself conveys as its message, and how well that message is conveyed i.e. how far we have to dig to arrive at that message. He takes poetry as a communication; language is a source of communication, so a critic always focuses on the paradoxical language as a key to elaborate the whole meaning. Theorists of New Criticism say that a critic should be free from every bound and he must judge objectively. Taken into consideration these tenets, the text of the selected novel has been analyzed to find answers to the research questions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper analyzes Paulo Coelho's *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* in the light of New Criticism. The study presents God as the symbol of unwavering love and kindness to believers and explore human efforts made in search of this love. The theory analyzes the text of a work and presents the work as whole to derived ultimate meaning. This papers also analyze the text of the selected novel to search the incorporation of this concept and to explore human efforts as portrayed in the text,

therefore: the researcher develops a conceptual framework of this theory and uses Harry Anderson's idea the feminine face of God as scheming for the interpretation of the text to achieve the objectives of the study. The paper has been written according to the qualitative methods of the research and the selected text is analyzed through Close Reading technique. At the commencement of the 21st century, close reading remains an acceptable approach to interpret the text. At its most extreme, it urges to ignore exterior circumstances like social conditions at the time of production and effects on the reader in favor of intense and personal engagement with the text's language like those of literary devices, figures of speech, symbol, and structure. Therefore, it best suits the write up of this paper.

DATA ANALYSIS

From the earlier history to the twentieth century other than Mother Marry, the figure of Eve has also been dominating western literature in particular and the world literature in general. The word Eve is also used as a symbol which stands for all the women and girls. Thousand of references can be quoted to prove the point but the point which is rather important is this that Eve stands as a weak and feeble symbol that is only a source of gratification for the males. She is the one who was created out of Man's rib who can't think, can't realize the higher ideals of sacrifice and purity and one who was the reason of Man's Fall and consequently the expulsion from the heaven. This is not only common among the three-religions mentioned earlier but also in Hinduism where woman is considered a seducer to carnal pleasures. And one of the greatest contradictions regarding status of women in this religion is that at the one hand woman is considered the lowest and cause of human sins and on the other hand the same woman is attributed the qualities like purity, chastity, and virginity. Prof. Shubha Tiwari (2012) in his essay "The Female Face of God" says that The Concept of 'Purity' becomes very typical when one speaks of women. Purity, chastity, virginity—traditional religions all over the world have burdened the female folk with these heavy ideas. Guilt seems to be a female forte.

The text of the selected novel has been interpreted in the context of this scenario which Paolo Coelho has presented a refreshing moderate alternative in the figure of Mother Marry. Not only this but he also given a new concept of spirituality. According to Coelho purity exist in mind and self respect. To live by compromising our dignity is not purity. Formal religion perceives woman ultimately as mother therefore the production houses must be pure; only then the product will be good.

This concept of purity has really burdanized the women and perhaps one of the reasons of Western world drifting away from religion. Women feel it impractical. By portraying a female face of God and a new concept of purity Coelho takes off this burden from the shoulders of women:

She was normal. She had already had other children. The Bible tells us that Jesus had two Brothers. Virginity, as it relates to Jesus, is based on a different thing: Marry initiated a new generation of grace. A new era began. (p.66)

The physical relation of Pillar and her Friend (the disciple of Marry) even can't deprive them of their spirituality and purity----instead it enhances and clarifies their path for which they have been searching:

I kissed him hard.... they did not know that this kiss stood for my whole life---and his life as well. The life of anyone who has waited, dreamed, and searched for their true path. (p.171)

From the very beginning when the Friend (the name of this character has not been mentioned anywhere in the novel) is going to deliver a lecture in Madrid one of the audiences says, "he is giving us back what was ours.... They can't return us something that has always belonged to us" (p.173). The Friend who himself believes in the feminine side of God, is in search of the question that "All of the great religions-----including Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam-----are masculine. Men are in charge of the dogmas, men make the law, and usually all the priests are men" (p.174). After the seminar, Brida takes Pilar to the statue of the Goddess i.e. moon which shown brilliantly through the bar to which she calls "O mirror of the Earth Goddess" (p. 175). *Brida* also says that women can know and understand the feminine side of God better than men because at the very beginning of life when men inhabiting caves men used to remain outside on hunting and other works whereas women remained in caves, *the womb of the Mother*, and thus taught every thing to women. Therefore, women came to understand the cycle of creation. She exemplifies by saying the female body are made on the pattern and repeat the rhythm of the moon.

Sufism, spirituality, mysticism, and alternative ways to pray God all found their way in *By the River Piedra I Sat down and wept*. Coelho boldly suggests that God should be conceived in female

face and prayed in female ways. He conveys this message by creating moist and rain in the atmosphere, and far away and dreamlike locations.

In *By the River Piedra, I Sat down and wept*, Paulo Coelho has presented God as feminine having unwavering love for believer. The Friend (protagonist of the story) considers himself Disciple of Female God. He is on the mission to represent true feminine god to the world. Paulo Coelho has definitely a purpose and motivation in portraying the God as feminine or Mother God. This idea generates self-love and self respects in the people when they think about the unconditional love of Mother God, because mothers never put any conditions or demand anything for her love toward her children. The moment we accept the idea that God is Mother we feel get accepted. As Children feel no problem in crying in the same way we can accept our weaknesses in front of mother god, and she will never let anything bad happen to us. Pilar struggles to restore her faith in God and finally find that God is benign to her “because I have suffered, and God didn’t listen to my prayers.... God is love. But the one who understands this best is the Virgin” (p.54). this shows that God never leaves the followers alone and wait for the conjure and return of the believer to divine side. God is portrayed along as the symbol of love and affection.

The writer has also used two major other symbols *water* and *earth* for the physical as well as intellectual representation of benign God. Even the Title of the novel is in itself very symbolic. Though it is apparently strange but at the same time it is pregnant with meanings. Water comes out of ground and both ground and water represent feminine side of God. When we weep by the river piedra it absorbs all our pains, grieves and sufferings along with the water and makes our heart purified and contented as the Female God does. *River* and *weeping* both refer to water which is a feminine symbol and refer to creation and regeneration. She protects us with her walls of stones and purifies us with Her waters. Water is one of Her manifestations because it comes out of her womb i.e. earth. Marry suffers but shows strength of faith in God. She shows grace and now “She is the cosmic bride, Earth, which opens to the heavens and allows itself to be fertilized.... She is the feminine face of God. She has her own divinity (Coelho, 1999, p. 66). this shows that God’s love for believers is unlimited and unmoving. Similarly, Coelho is also well aware of that fact mentioned above; God is in everything, enhances the status of man. This is why the Friend becomes essentially divine and performs miracles. Coelho world is also free of time and space. The female face of God can appear any time any where and her disciple can see Her and can enlightened them through the knowledge. The Mother helps Her children come out of their sufferings and soothes them in their pains. In every era and age new definitions and concepts of morality and religion have been emerging and the old one withering. Every age has its own sets of belief and ideas. According to Paulo Coelho these ideas may be not consistent and may be a subject to change, but Faith is always right and at winning position. He asserts that all the religions are right:

The Buddhists were right, the Hindus were right, the Muslims were right, and so were the Jews. Whenever someone follows a path of faith---sincerely follows---he or she is able to unite with God and to perform miracles.... God is the same, even though he has a thousand names; it is up to us to select a name for him. (p.90)

The love of God is unchanging and unmoving. He has affections for believer like a mother has for her children. The female face of God visits Bernadette eighteen times before telling that “*I am the Immaculate Conception*”. Bernadette still did not know that even before the advent of Christianity, the mountains of Pyrenees were peopled by the Celts who were devotee of the Goddess. Their generations understood the feminine face of God and shared in Her Love and Her glory.

In Paulo Coelho we also come across another belief like the Hindu concept of reincarnation, the belief that the soul lives again into a new body after the death of someone, to continue spiritual evolvment. The Friend prays the Holy spirit to take his *gift* back from him and assures Pilar that this *gift* will be passed on to somebody else because it is never wasted. He believes that soul of the Marry will enter into some other person who will carry out Her mission to make people realize the unwavering love of God.

The author while portraying the unconditional love of God has shown that deeper and revised interest in mythology. He develops the inters of the reader by a more imaginative expression of religious truths, as said earlier by Karen Armstrong. Paulo also has nullified the assumption that divine religions i.e. Christianity, Judaism and Islam are devoid of any mythology and poetic symbolism. He, like Joseph Campbell, has linked ancient myths and those still prevalent in the traditional societies by

exploring the long-lasting mythology of mankind. In *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* most colorful, meaningful and thoughtful poetic symbols of religion to depict reality and true face of God.

CONCLUSION

Whatever conclusion we may reach about the reality of God, the history of this idea must tell us about something important about the human mind and the nature of our aspirations. We can learn that God does not exist in any simplistic sense. The very word God is a symbol of reality. Paulo Coelho believes that every Human being is possessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and that they can do miracles, heal, foresee and understand as the Friend and Pilar achieved these spiritual states and regained their lost faith by asking the mercy of God and choosing his way. They should have made efforts and shown concern to find the love and intimacy with God. In Paulo Coelho's view we can achieve these spiritual heights more comfortably and easily only when the feminine face of God, the Mother God shows Her motherly care and kindness, and benevolence towards her children.

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