



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.2., 2017 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

MYSTIC REALIZATION IN PAULO COELHO'S 'VERONICA DECIDES TO DIE'

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ABSTRACT

Mysticism is regarded as a kind of ecstasy or altered state of consciousness which is given religious or spiritual meaning [Wikipedia]; it is beyond one's understanding. It is not accepted by the materialistic society but sometimes mysticism is realized in some way. In our lifetime, erratically, we came across some unknown things that we cannot understand. The present research paper is an attempt to justify mysticism scientifically.

Paulo Coelho, who is known for his vast knowledge, tried to prove the existence of something inaccessible that exists in the world. In his novel 'Veronica Decides to Die', the character, Zedka is sketched to be the one who has realized a mystical thing. With the help of the doses given to her, she can enter into a state of coma, and in that condition she can experience an astral journey. An Astral journey, which is known as the most difficult and impossible mystical thing, is experienced by Zedka. Many writers have written about astral journey very few are capable of giving scientific justification to this mysterious thing. An Astral projection refers to 'An out of body experience' in which astral body leaves physical body and travels in an astral plane. Paulo Coelho is successful in justifying mysticism scientifically with the help of such an astral journey.

Key words –Mysticism, ecstasy, inaccessible, astral journey, astral projection, realization

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Introduction

The Brazilian writer, Paulo Coelho, [1947] who is one of the most widely read authors of the world, is known for his different themes. In his lifetime he has faced different problems. Once upon a time, he was the most frustrated man who was so unpredictable, that he had to get admitted to an asylum, a mental hospital and was being treated as a mad person. Paulo Coelho spent many days in the mental hospital. He has used his own experience in his novel 'Veronica Decides to Die'.

The thrust of the present research paper is to revisit Paulo Coelho's novel 'Veronica decides die' to realize the mystic, experienced by an abnormal character Zedka.

Background

The story of veronica takes place in a mental hospital, Villette. Veronica, who is fed up with her life tries to commit suicide but anyhow survives and gets admitted in Villate, a renowned mental hospital in

Slovenia. She meets Zedka, a mentally abnormal patient in the same hospital. The novel is interwoven with the stories of some abnormal characters i.e. Veronica, Zedka, Mari and Edward. All of them are suffering from different mental problems like depression, frustration, panic disorder, schizophrenia etc.

What is mysticism?

In today's material world, everything is measured logically with reason and explanations. So mysticism is not commonly accepted, rather it is discarded as illogical.

Mysticism is a vague or ill-defined religious or spiritual belief, especially associated with the occult. The Cambridge English dictionary defines mysticism as-

'The belief that there is hidden meaning in life or each human being can unite with God'.

Dan Merkur, [mysticism, Encyclopedia, Britannica] defines mysticism as-

'Mysticism is popularly known as –'Become one with the absolute or the infinite, but it is also referred to as a 'kind of ecstasy or altered state of consciousness which has a spiritual meaning'.

For Gellman, Jerome, [mysticism', The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy 2011]. Mysticism is -'An insight, in ultimate or hidden truth'. But in the modern era mysticism has been assigned to any extraordinary experience or extra-sensory experiences.

In the Greek language, mystic means to conceal.

[Sharf, 1995-b] opines about mysticism as -

'Mystical experiences are marking insight into religious truth is a modern development. It is based upon the background and experience of the mystic'.

In his article 'The neurophysiology of the brain with emphasis on mystical experience', Peter Fenwick [1980], a neurological researcher, says-

'It is a neutral trigger. Temporal lobe generates feeling of 'I' and gives feeling of familiarity or strangeness to the perceptions of the senses. It seems to be involved in mystical experience. Sometimes it is temporal lobe epilepsy, a chronic disorder of nervous system characterized by recurrent unprovoked focal seizures that originate in temporal lobe and last about one or two minutes. In it, they may lose their awareness, or be in dreamlike state, or have strange sensation like hallucination.[temporal-lobe-epilepsy-Wikipedia]

The existence of any abnormal feeling is rejected by the doctors, for them it is mental disorder.

Likewise we can say that mysticism is beyond our normal perception.

In 'Veronica Decides to Die', the character Zedka is considered to be wise mad. According to Zedka anyone who lives in his world is mad'.

'You have Einstein, saying there was no time or space, just the combination of the two Or Columbus insisting that on the other side of the world laid not an abyss but a continent....and thousands of others –all lived in their own world'.

[Paulo Coelho 'Veronica Decides to Die' .P. 30]

Research Method

It is a descriptive, qualitative study based on primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected in the form of Paulo Coelho's novel; 'Veronica Decides to Die' [Eng. Tran] for secondary sources the critical books and internet sources are utilized.

Discussion

Zedka is suffering from panic disorder, a mental illness. So she is being treated with shock treatment which is generally considered to be inhuman, where the patient is given electric shocks and the patient suffers a lot, sometimes the torture becomes so unbearable that the patient dies.

In Villette, Zedka is being treated with the treatment which is forbidden outside because it is very risky and vulnerable.

The treatment

She is being injected a dose of insulin which is used by diabetics to combat high blood glucose however when the dose is much larger than normal, the consequent drop in blood glucose provokes a state of coma. And enters a state of induced coma and the state of coma allows the organism to rest; its functions are drastically reduced and any existing tension disappears. Her eyes fixed on some point in the distance. She cannot speak, move, hear...

... But she can experience something alluring, enchanting, fascinating, and dynamic during her experience of insulin shock. She can leave her body and fly anywhere as if floating in space. She is taking her astral journey!

Zedka learns about the treatment, she reads many books regarding astral journey and shock treatment and she comes to know that the treatment was used in 1930, but had been completely banned and presently it was a crime.

No one had experienced such things, except Zedka who had felt its magic! So she starts reading about occultism or the existence of soul. And she finds that she is experiencing astral travel which was experienced by many people. Many of them have developed the technique to induce it. She learns the techniques and with the help of her philosophical knowledge and psychiatric treatment she can realize the mystic experience of astral travel.

At first ...there is the strange irritating sound and her spirit gets separated from her body, followed by a shock, a rapid loss of consciousness, and then she feels the peace and joy of floating in the air. But her spirit remains attached to her body by a silvery cord, a cord that could be stretched indefinitely.[Veronica Decides to Die' P.47 -48] According to many legends if the cord is cut the person may die. Zedka, with the help of the astral journey, can go anywhere, almost anywhere in the world and return to her body,; the cord is so thin that no one can see it.

She can change her roots not physically, like planes but imagining and concentrating on the exact location. The astral journey is made through mysterious tunnels. You imagine yourself in a place and you enter the appropriate tunnel at terrifying speed and that place would appear.

Initially she thought that during her astral journey she may meet ghosts but she found the spirits of many living people, many of them not even aware of what their spirits were experiencing, because in some other part of the world they were sleeping deeply. They were dreaming. According to Sigmund Freud,

'Dreams are fulfillments of wishes; they are constructed by a highly complicated activity of the mind. [Freud, 185]

Zedka is abnormal so what she thinks is also beyond normal perception. She argues that all great personalities, who had invented something new for the world, were mad imagining something impossible or extra normal. They imagined and then realized it. Zedka also realizes her mystic experience, all of us might be experiencing such experiences in dreams, in imagination but we are not aware of that or rather we control them, but Zedka was able to realize the mysticism scientifically. The books that she read, had been very useful in teaching her how to get more and more out of her astral journey. She learns many techniques of astral travel like-whenver she wants to move from one place to another, she has to concentrate on projecting herself into space, and imagine the place where she wants to go, she will enter into the appropriate tunnel at a terrifying speed and the imagined place will appear within a second.

Zedka is mentally ill. She is suffering from depression, lack of chemical substance, serotonin, in the organism and madness is the inability to communicate your ideas and one in a every five individuals suffers from mental disorder .Serotonin is one of the compound responsible for how human beings feel. A lack of serotonin impairs ones capacity to concentrate at work, to sleep, to eat and to enjoy life's pleasures. When this substance is completely absent, the person experiences despair, pessimism, a sense of futility, terrible tiredness, anxiety, difficulties in making decision or ends up sinking into permanent gloom, which leads either to complete apathy or to suicide. Any drastic change in life could trigger depression.[Veronica Decides to Die'....p.69] Zedka is different from material beings who only think and believe in material things that can be seen with open eyes. Science needs proof and it doubts that there are spirits but recently a woman Anita Moorjani who is suffering from breast cancer, experienced something extraordinary in her near death experience. In her inspirational memoir [DYING TO BE ME] Anita Moorjani shared her near death experience how after fighting cancer for almost four years, her body overwhelmed by the malignant cells spreading throughout her system-began shutting down. She was very near to death; in her near death experience she realized her inherent worth and the actual cause of her disease. Upon regaining consciousness she found that

her condition had improved so rapidly that she was able to be released from the hospital within weeks...without a trace of cancer in her body!

She says-

‘I had a choice to come back...or not.

I choose to return when I realized that ‘heaven is a state, not a place’

[Moojani, ‘Dying to Be Me’]

And she has found the heaven in her life.

The reason behind Zedka’s madness--

Zedka was not happy with her life, she was 35 years old, married happily with a well-settled handsome man, had children, almost everything that is needed to live a happy life ,but the life she was living was material ,totally practical so there was no place for emotions ,feelings, passions.

But one day she came across the statue of Persene and suddenly remembered her first love .The feeling of her first love started disturbing her and she started thinking about it continuously and it affected her normal behavior. She needed love, emotions to sooth her but she got nothing from her family. And she became mentally imbalanced.

She could fulfill almost all her impossible desires with the help of her astral travel. She is happy now and she is cured .It doesn’t matter whether it’s true or not but she proves it scientifically and it helps her to get rid of her depression. In this way mystic realization helps Zedka to realize her life and the mystery of being alive.

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