

Quest of Spiritual Knowledge in Paulo Coelho's *Hippie*: A Popular Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

Coelho's Hippie is based on the time in which Coelho is living the way of a hippie. Spiritual seekers make their way to India and even Nepal in the sixties in search of enlightenment. In the 1960s, the groups of unconventional appearance are associated with a subculture and reject conventional values. The paper tries to meet its objective by explaining how the protagonist cultivates his journey and achieves the spiritual awakening in the end of his journey. This paper explores issues of Quest of Spiritual Knowledge in Paulo Coelho's Hippie through the lens of popular culture because in the today's world the text is connected to its cultural archetype. It interprets the issue of the hero quest and spiritual education in Coelho's text and then its connection with popular culture. Coelho's Hippie relates to how Paulo as well as the other young boys and girls challenge western and non-western concept of culture, and they leave their homes to experiment the world on their own. These youths appear to create and organize the hippie culture, live in separate commune and travel far and wide in quest of peace, freedom and love as protest. To interpret the text, I apply the readings and concepts of Joseph Campbell, John Storey, Ray Brown and Marshall Fishwick as a theoretical framework. The paper argues that although the hippie culture progresses as the counterculture of the 1960s youth movement, the protagonist's quest of spiritual awakening is an issue of the study.

Key Words: subculture. Popular culture, hippie, youth movement, hero journey, quest, spirituality.

Introduction

The paper discusses the protagonist's quest of spiritual awakening in Paulo Coelho's *Hippie*. Its objective is to explain how Paulo, the protagonist of the novel, accomplishes his journey and gains spirituality toward the end of his journey. Paulo Coelho's life begins with a complicated birth in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, he eventually survives against all complexities. Before becoming internationally known as a worldwide bestselling author, Paulo lives many different lives. He trifles with suicide, so his parents bring him to insane asylums. He suffers from the cruelty of electric shock therapy. He takes drugs, tries sex, and spends time in prison. He revolutionized Brazilian rock music. Finally, he rediscovers his faith. In *Hippie*, Paulo is a young and skinny Brazilian with long, flowing hair and a goatee. He

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starts a journey via different countries. He meets Karla, a young girl looking for a travel companion to Nepal. They embark on the Magic Bus and travel across Europe and Asia to Kathmandu. The other travelers on the trip talk about their relationships. With no plans for the future, Paulo makes a journey but his journey enhances his life. It benefits him in his quest for true meaning. The hero's journey and quest of spiritual knowledge aid an analysis of the text with the perspective of popular culture. Thus, the paper argues that the hero's journey is instrumental as a quest of spiritual knowledge.

Literature Review

Many authors and reviewers have analyzed and commented on the text in multiple ways. Critics like Chethana Dinesh and Indrani Bose have given the same views, commenting on the text. This uninspired novel tells the story of a young man named Paulo exploring love, spirituality, and the world during the 1960s. Paulo, an aspiring writer born in Brazil, hitchhikes his way before deciding to head for Amsterdam, where he has heard of a new movement of love and sexual liberation (Coelho, 2018, Para: 1). The author discusses the adventure and its achievement but he mentions little about cultural myth. Likewise, Chethana Dinesh (2019) argues, "In *Hippie*, his most autobiographical novel to date, Paulo Coelho takes us back in time to re-live the dream of a generation that longed for peace and dared to challenge the established social order" (para: 1). However, she fails to mention the hero archetype and normally discusses the former generations that want peace and contend with the social structure. Similarly, Bose (2018) mentions, "Paulo Coelho's latest is about the journey that helped him in his search for meaning. Love and spirituality are the two dominant themes in *Hippie*" (para: 4). She views Paulo undertaking a long journey and makes constant search of love and spirituality for his life. The text deals with love and spirituality as the two major themes. In a different note, another critic writes that Karla harbors the "aspirations of seeing the world from a different perspective" so Paulo and Karla start journeying together on a bus trip to explore innermost truth "along the hippie trail" (Menon, 2021, para:1). Conversely, in "The Hippie Narrative", Scott MacFarlane (2007) argues, "The novel as a cultural form could be the most overlooked popular cultural artifact of the 1960s counterculture" (p.161). He contests that the popular cultural artifact has been ignored in the text. In the different view, Robert A. Segal (1978) comments, "Modern man finds life meaningless because he has no myths, which alone give life meaning; that modern man has no myths because science precludes his acceptance of myths at the literal level" (p.67). He strongly believes that modern life is futile without myths. Meaningful life emancipates from the myth. Men forget the myths because of modern science. Yet these two critics have not discussed the area of the hero quest.

The aforesaid critics, reviewers and writers have highlighted the thematic aspect and other perspectives of culture on the text. Hippies are seen as members of the counterculture of the 1960s youth movement. This subculture involves a rejection of conventional values. Hence, the paper claims that very little attention has not been paid to the hero quest. Thus, the present paper attempts to examine an issue of the protagonist's quest of spiritual knowledge.

Methodology

To interpret the text, the paper writer embarks upon the influential perspective of Joseph Campbell, John Storey and Marshall Fishwick. Particularly, the hero's journey by Campbell helps to substantiate the main argument of the paper. In the same fashion, the hero's journey and quest of spiritual knowledge works as a theoretical framework. Here, Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" monomyth gives an account of the hero-journey-quest. He suggests three stages of the hero's journey. The hero leaves the ordinary world. This phase of the journey refers to departure. The Hero ventures into unknown territory. It is the special world where he turns into a true champion through various trials and challenges. This is known as initiation. The hero must return to the ordinary world but with an elixir. The Hero returns in triumph. In this context, Campbell (1985) observes, "The archetypes to be discovered and assimilated are precisely those that have inspired, throughout the annals of human culture, the basic images of ritual, mythology, and vision. (p.17). Here, C. G. Jung terms the archetypal images which are assumed to operate in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy in the name of wisdom.

Likewise, yet another critic argues, "If aesthetics is a way of seeing objects aesthetically, rather than a way of recognizing intrinsic aesthetic properties in objects, then there is no reason why we should not have an aesthetics of anything, including popular culture" (Storey, 2004, p. 92). He emphasizes the aesthetics of popular culture as a literary study. One must see the objects aesthetically. Marshall W. Fishwick (1985) says: "The hero is archetypal, a paradigm who bears the possibilities of life, courage, love—the commonplace, the indefinable" (p.59). In the Greek sense, the hero is endowed with supernatural power. This heroic notion derives from the myths that become the vehicles of religion and custom.

Discussion

Paulo decides on an adventure from his land to explore the world of mystery and probably his unknown territory. Therefore, the start of the hero's journey is conceived from the ordinary world. His passion for becoming a celebrated writer instigates him to explore the world. Another reason is that a Hippie movement as a strong reaction to society and the state has impacted him. This movement has become part of popular culture as it circulates rapidly from the USA to the whole of Europe and South Asia. Joseph Campbell(2004) believes: "This first stage of the mythological journey—which we have designated the "call to adventure" —signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (p. 59). Let us note the context of the protagonist's adventure. Essentially, the hippie movement of the 60s and 70s is the cause of mobility of the particular youngsters around the world. The protagonist decides to hitchhike and get to foreign lands. Coelho (2018) says, "In September 1970, airplane tickets were outrageously expensive, which meant only the rich could travel. OK, that wasn't entirely true for an enormous number of young people whom these outdated media outlets could see only for their outward appearance [...]" (p.3). Earlier, only the

wealthy people could travel by airbus despite the expensive air ticket. But still, a number of young people make it possible to travel extensively. In spite of huge challenges and risks, the young people dissent from their parents and leave home for freedom. Thus, the protagonist is the one who decides to venture into the unknown world. This is his departure from the ordinary world.

Hippie's descriptions have formulated a different identity as the consumerism of popular culture and made the hippie fashions and mannerisms popular to a huge audience. Paulo's journey to other parts of the world connects the hippies' lifestyle, line of thought and an understanding of society from their own perspectives. In this view, Coelho (2018) observes the particularities of the hippies who "wore their hair long, dressed in bright-colored clothing, and never took a bath". However, such news in the newspaper was untrue, because these young teenagers hardly reflected on the tabloid. In addition to this, the older generation assumed that any news item helped to vilify those considered as "a danger to society and common decency" (p.3). Importantly, the hippie is recognizable by the way the group is dressed. The new appearance and mannerism contrast with social expectation and common courtesy. They condemn the established regulations by forming a community of their own kind. In this way, the hippies move about in quest of values, meanings and justification for human life. Here, Browne (2005) notes the specific roles of various organizations which shape popular culture and act as the creators of culture setting trends for new popular culture (p.32). In this perspective, the critic believes that the organizations create culture and set trends for consumption of material goods. It is often done through the advertisement and market. It strengthens the economy.

Creating Hippie trajectory constitutes a sort of popularity of the hippie way of thinking and living across the borders. Several young boys and girls like to travel widely at affordable travel fares and live in communes, sharing the same views about life, family and music. It is music that voices out their feelings and emotions. Storey (2015) defines popular culture as a "quasi-mythical rural "folk culture," and the other – and it was very much the "other" – was popular culture as the degraded "mass culture" of the new urban-industrial working class" (p.1). The critic agrees that popular culture takes its root in folk culture which seems valid in law as though its actuality is felt as the degraded mass culture consumed by the working class people in the urban areas. In Hippie, the following description can serve an example of the hippie path:

A new hippie trail was created, from Amsterdam (Holland) to Kathmandu (Nepal), on a bus that charged a fare of approximately a hundred dollars and traveled through countries that must have been pretty interesting: Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and part of India. (Coelho, 2018, p.10)

The given extract explains the hippie culture and its trace right from Europe to Asia. one can travel through pretty interesting courtiers just on the bus with a relatively low bus fare. This is how the hippie as subculture has been the most popular icon of the young but curious generations across the world but not everyone chases this hippie path.

However, the crossing of the first threshold starts only when Paulo decides to travel to Holland where he meets with his companion looking for a man to travel to Nepal with her. Paulo and Karla meet together, spend some time in Amsterdam and venture to Istanbul where he stops to search Sufism. The critic remarks, “The personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the “threshold guardian” at the entrance to the zone of magnified power” (Campbell, 1985, p.68). He points out the custodians who guide and support him in a journey of life. For instance, it is Karla from whom he gets service and firm company. Obviously, they travel together until both terminate their journey to Nepal. Coelho (2018) comments, “Paulo and the man from Argentina had already discussed just about everything [...] they both carried with them memories, names, curiosity, and above all a deep fear of what might happen when they reached the Dutch border” (p.17). Most people lack the courage to pursue although those are free and determined to have experiences. Paulo continues journeying from Argentina to Holland carrying his memory and curiosity, but he suspects a kind of fear of an unpleasant incident at the border.

Paulo’s trials and tribulations begin in Istanbul city. When he travels to the busiest part of Amsterdam and Turkey, he finds it hard to tackle the situations. Before reaching Holland, he is thoroughly interrogated and given the third degree torture by the security personnel but he is released. Thus, he faces a series of trials not in Amsterdam but in Istanbul. The protagonist observes, “his dream was to become a writer, and he had paid a high price for this: stints in psychiatric hospitals, prison and torture, the prohibition from the mother of his teenage girlfriend that she get anywhere near him, the scorn of his classmates when they saw he had begun to dress differently” (Coelho, 2018, p.98). In his teens, the protagonist has been put to trials like being admitted in asylum and caged in a prison house and brutally treated there, his girlfriend’s mother does not allow him to meet and talk to her. Besides that, his friends mock his appearance because he is dressed differently. In this view, Mary R. Lefkowitz (1990) in the article “The Myth of Joseph Campbell” states, “In the New Testament, Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the Devil; but he resisted, and the Devil left him, and angels appeared and waited on him” (p.433). The author strongly believes in the supreme power of God. The protagonist struggles desperately for escape but finally is rescued by a certain divine power. Paulo has to have suffered significantly because of his committed passion for becoming a writer. When he reveals his dreams, he faces such trials. In summary, it is a kind of rebellion from the youngsters against the established values of society. Nevertheless, Marshall Fishwick’s hero’s pattern plays a role and is straightaway proper. Fishwick (1985) articulates, “the hero is archetypal, a paradigm who bears the possibilities of life, courage, love—the commonplace, the indefinable which define our lives” (p.59). At this point, the critic strongly asserts that the hero model has been recognized in the human psychic world.

Heroism, valour and adventure are the motivating elements that always drive the humans to explore the unknown territory and get a reward. Thus, the protagonist exhibits these potentials while journeying to unknown territory.

The protagonist must meet his ordeal in his life; consequently, like the hero, his attempt to complete his journey has been to face the biggest test of all his life. He meets with the hurdles in several places while travelling to Amsterdam and Istanbul in particular. Campbell (2004) gives an allusion to the “difficult tasks motif” that becomes similar to Psyche's search for her lost beloved, Cupid (p.81). The protagonist wanders in pursuit of meaningful but peaceful life and interacts with whomever he meets on the journey. He explores into his mind and tries these questions about the wonders of the spiritual world. Coelho (2018) explains, “An immense, indescribable happiness washes over the entire universe. Christ on earth. Krishna in your veins. Buddha smiling down on you from heaven. No hallucinations, this is reality, true reality” (p. 100). Human happiness showers on the people everywhere but still they look thirsty. The protagonist concludes that everybody is filled with compassion in the presence of God no matter what religion is followed.

The nexus between hippie culture and rock music fashions the notions of popular culture because the rock music emerges as a strong reaction to the classical mode of music and the hippies take the rock music as an influential medium of expression. Music is a part of popular culture. Rock music has started in the USA and later gains its popularity across the globe. In this respect, John Storey (2015) comments, “Popular culture is simply culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people” and many people approve a quantitative index undoubtedly (p. 5). Take for example, concerts, sporting events and festivals increase the high attendance records and people consume these activities to a greater extent in public spheres. In the text, the protagonist has the following observations, “. . . he pretended to be interested in the music below: Simon & Garfunkel, the Beatles, James Taylor, Santana, Carly Simon, Joe Cocker, B. B. King, Creedence Clearwater Revival—a long list that continued to grow with each month, each day, each hour” (Coelho 2018 p.91). Here, the protagonist mentions a long list of popular music of the day and this reflects his interest in the rock music, which has attracted the immediate attention of the youngsters in every corner of the world in the 60s and 70s. Obviously, the rock musical bands and rock singers connect the hippie culture because of strange-looking dress codes, lifestyle and performance on the grand stage. Thus, the hippie path and the rock music have been popularized in the public spheres.

In the hero-journey myth, the hero triumphs, becomes victorious and returns with the trophy in hands. Sometimes he appears to refuse the return from the journey. For example, When Paulo decides to stay in Istanbul and learns the Sufi, he has almost accomplished his journey. He achieves what he deserves to be in his life. He becomes a writer upon his return to Brazil. In this view, Campbell (2004) states: “When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return

with his life-transmuting trophy” (p.179). The traveller completes the hero-quest with the help of the mentor, the divine figure or the humans before he has to return with the award. It is the light of knowledge. It is the hero’s transformation. Here, Paulo’s most-awaited reward completes when he decidedly becomes immersed in the ways of Sufi and starts seeking the truth of life. It teaches him how to remain in a state of ecstasy recurrently. Paulo meets an unknown man frequently in Istanbul. Referring to the Sufism, the author writes:

I want to learn the ways of the Sufi. I need a teacher.

Then seek the Truth. Seek always to be on its side, even when it brings you pain. There are times when the Truth goes quiet for long stretches, or when it doesn’t tell you what you want to hear. That’s Sufism. The rest is a series of sacred rites that do nothing more than intensify this state of ecstasy. (Coelho, 2018, p. 237)

Paulo terminates a further journey with Karla and tells her that he must stop to study the rituals of the Sufi. He requests the man to be his mentor. It teaches him to seek the truth. It requires patience and the rigorous practice of meditation. Conducting a series of sacred ceremonies exaggerates the state of bliss. Thus, the spiritual journey begins to take shape.

Similarly, in the mythic tale, the hero escalates and achieves triumphantly in his uninterrupted journeys. He meets the magic flight. In the text, Paulo travels extensively and accumulates a vast range of experiences and the worldview. He explores the world he has never thought of. So, Campbell (2004) notes, “If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society” the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron (p.182). The hero is ordered to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society after the deity blesses the hero with the light of wisdom. He is expected to transform society and educate the people. In this connection, the writer terms Sufism as an Islamic belief that updates the human mind and at the same time helps understand that words fail to “describe the Infinite” (Coelho 2018, p 238). Human beings try to explore and explain the mysteries of the world and its maker but they fail to do so. Coelho (2018) writes, “Listen to His voice each time you pass a beggar on the street. That’s what every religion teaches and it’s the only promise we ought to make—the only one” (p. 275). Arguably, broad humanity is the greatest religion and nothing else. This is true of every religion in the world. In summary, the spiritual journey in one’s life (or that of the protagonist) is the way of exploring the self that seeks probably the love and peace for humankind and this equates with meditation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Coelho’s *Hippie* explores the hero-journey quest based on the myth of the hero although the initiation of the Hippie movement of the 60s emancipates from the restraints of socio-political phenomena. The hippie trail starts with the huge protest and the strong reactions of the young people against the war, society’s mindset and the state.

It develops as a sub-culture and gradually becomes the culture of the people. Campbell has identified three stages of the hero's adventure: namely departure, initiation and return. Accordingly, Coelho's *Hippie* is based on the hero quest pattern. The protagonist, Paulo, leaves his country. Embarking on the magic bus, he travels extensively and explores the special world. Finally he becomes enlightened after having faced a number of tests and trials during the adventure. He returns home with knowledge. The concept of popular culture is outlined in the ancient myths which become the shared behaviors and experiences of the public spheres. Therefore, the hero quest, myth and popular culture show their interconnections. The critic adds that folklore and folk song help to construct and enhance the notion of popular culture. Apart from the discussions of the hero's quest, the text can be interpreted from other perspectives such as the mass media, sports, rock and popular musical concerts, cultural festivals and many more.

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