



Research Paper

Defeat of the Winner in Paulo Coelho's "The Winner Stands Alone"

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ABSTRACT: *The novel 'The Winner Stands Alone' by Paulo Coelho portrays the importance of morality or rather the devastating consequences of the lack of morality in the pursuit of the materialistic dreams human beings are obsessed about. Taking the International Film Festival as the setting of the novel, Paulo explores the dark side of the world of celebrities and thereby makes a poignant comment on the moral downfall of the modern man. Love demands understanding and compassion. However, Igor who was blinded by his interminable materialistic dreams could not understand this. In the pursuit of money and fame he forgets what a soul demands. Igor stands for the winners in life who achieve material success at the cost of love for the humanity. They are always alone forever as they are incapable of giving and receiving love.*

Keywords: *materialistic, dreams, success, humanity, winner*

I. INTRODUCTION

Paulo Coelho's 'The Winner Stand Alones' highlights the ill effects of the materialistic pursuits in the modern world. The present paper analyses the reasons behind the moral downfall of the protagonist in the novel.

II. THEMES IN PAULO COELHO'S NOVELS

Paulo Coelho writes his novels with strong universal themes dealing with the basic questions that humans often ask. What is the meaning of life? Where can one find happiness? What is the role of love and suffering in human life? In his novels we come across such fundamental questions about life and the themes surrounding humanity itself. When his characters try to explore answers to these questions they throw light on the philosophical dimensions of human life.

III. THE WINNER STANDS ALONE

'The Winner Stands Alone' by Paulo Coelho published in 2008 portrays the importance of morality or rather the devastating consequences of the lack of morality in the pursuit of the materialistic dreams human beings are obsessed with. Taking the International Film Festival as the setting of the novel, Paulo explores the dark side of the world of celebrities and thereby makes a poignant comment on the moral downfall of the modern man.

In the introduction to the novel, Paulo says that the novel is not a thriller, but a stark portrait of where we are at the moment. In the preface to the novel, he emphasizes that the recurrent themes in his books have been the importance of paying the price for following your dreams. However, to what extent can our dreams be manipulated? He feels that during the past few decades, we have lived in a culture that has privileged fame, money and power. Many of us have been led to believe that these are the only values worth pursuing, unaware of the consequences of perusing these false values. The ill effects of these values go unnoticed by us- until it is too late, and we are trapped. Paulo says that this novel says is about the trap. However, Paulo does not criticize all the people who belong to 'Super class', a class of people occupying the highest position in the social ladder in terms of materialistic success. He rather tries to depict how the materialistic power corrupts and blurs the vision of the reality.

Asked about the theme of the novel in an interview, Paulo says:

"In this book I wanted to explore how dreams can be manipulated and how people get shattered in the process. I'm not condemning vanity- since all under the sun is vanity as Saloman said. What I am interested in is in how people allow themselves to be dispossessed of themselves. In our current society there are collective standards that are completely anonymous and yet many try to subscribe to them. Some people believe their happiness is conditioned by money, fame, beauty... How does that happen? This book arose from this central

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question.” [1] In ‘Confession of a Pilgrim’ Juan Arias, asks Paulo if he is one of those who believe that the new technologies and latest scientific advancements are rather negative for the development of the spirit. Paulo answers:

Technology and scientific advancement, from internet to mobile phones and all the rest of the new things that might rain down on us, make up part of humanity’s path to make our work easier and more comfortable. The important thing is not to turn them into gods, but to know how to use them for what they are—tools to make our lives easier and give us greater power to communicate with like-minded people because don’t forget, humanity’s greatest sin is non-communication, unwanted and unloved solitude, forgetting that we were created to find each other’s mirror. And everything that makes it easier to find each other and communicate, definitely contributes to our becoming less inhuman and more sympathetic. [2]

Igor in ‘The Winner Stands Alone’ is a representative of that class in society which cannot maintain a balance between material pursuits and spiritual needs. The novel discusses the ill effects of the rat race that this class of people runs in order to achieve material success. It reminds us the famous lines by William Wordsworth; “The world is too much with us; Getting and spending we lay waste our powers” [3] In the pursuit of material success, people lose their powers to fulfill the requirements of their souls and as a result their growth as a human being is hindered. Paulo believes that man is responsible for not only his own well-being but also for the welfare of the society in which he lives. The story of the novel is set during the Cannes International Film Festival and the entire action takes place in 24 hours. Igor, the protagonist of the novel is a successful owner and president of a telephone company in Russia. He is a millionaire with every luxury in life at his feet. But unfortunately his wife, Ewa has left him two years ago. She has remarried Hamid Hussein, a famous fashion designer. Igor is unable to accept Ewa’s exit from his life and once had told her that he would destroy *whole worlds* to get her back. And now when she is not with him, he intends to do what he has once promised. He has come to the Festival to reclaim his wife and believes that there is nothing wrong in killing if the intentions are good.

The story of Igor and Ewa’s married life began with love and happiness. In the initial days of their marriage, love was their top priority though they were not financially well off. Igor had begun his small business getting loans and worked very hard. Soon his business grew and money began to come in. Igor was never satisfied. He wanted to go further. His small company grew into a multinational giant with branches in seven different time zones, making ever more, and ever more diverse investments. However, in the process of getting rich and famous, he took his wife for granted and neglected her. She started feeling sad and lonely. She tried to console her lonely soul by spending her days in shopping malls or having tea with friends, who always talk about the same things. Whenever she asked if they had not gone far beyond what they had planned and if it wasn’t time to realize their dream of living only on the love they felt for each other, he always asked for a little more time. When Igor asked her if she was not satisfied with what she had. She answered:

“Yes, I’m satisfied, but the problem is you’re not, and never will be. You’re insecure, afraid of losing everything you’ve achieved; you don’t know how to quit once you’re ahead. You’ll end up destroying yourself. You’re killing our marriage and my love”. [4] Consequently, Ewa left him. The events that followed after she left him, show that this process of getting rich and famous contributed nothing for being a true human being. Rather a man, who was once compassionate, started losing his empathy in the race of getting what he wanted. Paulo says:

“On the road to power, there’s no turning back. He would be an eternal slave to the road he’d chosen and he did ever realize his dream of abandoning everything, he would plunge immediately into a deep depression.” [5] Igor, instead of introspecting the reasons behind Ewa’s departure from his life, takes it as his defeat and makes up his mind to win her back “by destroying the worlds”. After a series of murders, he kills Hamid and Ewa too, only to realize the futility in what he has done. Just before killing Ewa, he says: “I came here because of you, only to realize that it was all pointless.” [6]

IV. CONCLUSION

Love demands understanding and compassion. However, Igor who was blinded by his interminable materialistic dreams could not understand this. Igor stands for the winners in life who achieve material success at the cost of love for the humanity. They are alone forever as they are incapable of giving and receiving love. Paulo 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 is simply land to be exploited; they follow their instincts and desires and care nothing for the collective well-being of society.” [7]

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