

Paulo Coelho's *Hippiie*: An Intense longing for Spiritual Connection

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Abstract

After penning around twenty works of fiction, Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian writer, is still delving deep in his life, to explore and to share more and more personal experiences. His latest creation Hippiie, unravels the outer as well as inner world of hippies, what they appear to the world, what they are truly at heart or what they genuinely want in life. Basically, it is about a road journey or can say, a spiritual road journey. In the text, hippies are shown clad in eye-catching rainbow hues, enjoying drugs to attain empty mind and soul so that some Supreme Energy could enter that blank. They chase this Super mystery all their lives. They look for some deep connection. Writer has very expertly chosen personal experiences as a hippie to tell readers a unique motif of his life. The lead character Paulo is presented as a mouthpiece of the writer, who is shown sharing variety of spiritual experiences with the readers.

Key Words: *Hippiie, Free, Love, Trail, Spiritual, Journey, Drugs, Colours*

Reference to this paper should
be made as follows:

Jasmeet Kaur,

*Paulo Coelho's Hippiie:
An Intense longing for
Spiritual Connection,*

Notions 2018,
Vol. IX, No.3,
pp. 14-21,

Article No.3

Online available at :
[http://anubooks.com/
?page_id=5005](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=5005)

Introduction

Paulo Coelho (24 August 1947- present), a Brazilian writer who has committed to paper around twenty incredible literary gems, doesn't need any introduction. His works work like a magic wand to lift the spirits of depressed, to instill curiosity in the hearts, to move strayed souls on the right track, to induce meaning in the meaninglessness, or to show experiences in a unique style. Yes, this is the writer who is living a diversely experienced life to share, to inspire and to encourage others. With such thoughts in mind, he has added a bit different hue to his vibrant series of works by giving a pen-picture of a culture, the very mention of which fabricates in everyone's mind an image of colorful, care free, dancing, roaming, and travelling people. Very straightly reflected through the title... it is about hippie culture. Paulo has shared a delicate experience of his life through this third person narrative which makes one journey through the time and space of 1970s or around. Paulo has given a new dimension to the life of hippies by connecting it to the spiritualism. The story revealed here is a part of his personal experiences influenced by spiritual gurus which he has clarified in the beginning of the text. He has tried to capsule the central motif at the outset in these words:

*“For Kabir, Rumi, Tagore, Paulo de Tarso, Hafez,
Who have been with me ever since I first discovered them,
Who have written part of the story of my life,
Which I tell in the book that follows- often using their words.”^{xi}*

The novel is about free people who instead of making commitments want to blow with the flow of the wind. They want to move in the direction where their hearts take them. They want to move on the road not taken, on the untrodden paths to enjoy extreme bliss. They want to be part of the mystery. They want to transcend the boundaries. They want to feel the mystical even if it is for a fraction of time. They are people whose appearances are in total contrast to saints but possess saintly attributes. They are notorious pilgrim souls and are known as hippies.

In the story two sites i.e. Piccadilly Circus, in London and Dam Square in Amsterdam, surface as the center of hippie people who are sprawling themselves in a longing to seek endless. Here, hippies are presented as 'a danger to an entire generation of diligent young boys and girls trying to succeed in life, with their horrible example of lewdness and "free love."² They are brought to spotlight by the Invisible Post which limits 'its news to the next great trail awaiting exploration by those insolent, dirty kids practicing "free love" and wearing clothes no one with any taste would ever put on.'³ Marijuana, hashish, cocaine and many more drugs are their lifelong

companions. The Invisible Post gives a very vivid and glossy description of hippies, “the girls with their braided hair covered in flowers, their long dresses, bright-colored shirts and no bras, necklaces of all shapes and sizes; the boys with their hair and beards that hadn’t been cut for months. They wore faded jeans with tears from overuse...”⁴ They always carry backpacks which include things of everyday need like a hand towel, a toothbrush, and soap bars as they mostly end up camping instead of staying in hotels. Incense is ‘one of the hippies’ major industries along with necklaces, batik shirts, and patches with the peace sign or flowers or the phrase “Flower Power” to be sewn onto clothing.’⁵

Young people from all over the world possessing passport, who aren’t sure about the exact meaning of the word Hippy, mostly meet on hippie trails. Maybe hippies are considered by them as “a large tribe without a leader”⁶ or “delinquents who don’t steal”⁷. Earlier hippie trail covered Machu Picchu, Tiahuanaco in Bolivia and Lhasa in Tibet. But as in September 1970 young hippie women ruled the world, the route was changed after the intimidation through the Invisible Post about the sexual assault of Mia Farrow by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in Indian caves. Changed itineraries created a new hippie trail- “from Amsterdam (Holland) to Kathmandu (Nepal), on a bus that charged a fare of approximately a hundred dollars and travelled through countries that must have been pretty interesting: Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and part of India (a great distance from Maharishi’s temple, it’s worth noting). The trip lasted three weeks and an insane number of miles.”⁸ In the novel, lives of hippies are compared with those of pilgrims who don’t stay at a single place. Similarly, hippies always try to achieve extremely blissful state (no doubt with the help of drugs) and look for something extra-unusual which can be gained only through personal immersion.

Paulo, who is voicing writers’ random life experiences as a hippie, seems to be going through troubled waters on being introduced first. His nightmarish experiences as an innocent prisoner when he first goes along a hippie trail with his ex-girlfriend, still disturb him. They set off to Machu Picchu on the Death Train, arrive in La Paz to come across their first hippies (two Germans and a Canadian woman). Hippies there ‘as a global tribe conscious of the responsibility and solidarity they owed one another, always wore the famous symbol of the inverted Viking rune.’⁹ The couple encounters more and more hippies on reaching the shores of Titicaca and finds themselves before a wonderful monument known as the Gate of the Sun. Paulo’s eyes fill with tears on seeing the sculptor as he feels some connection with the ancient ones living over there. He feels his soul being immersed in some valuable life lesson. He learns, “The Tradition of the Sun belongs to all- it wasn’t made for the

erudite or the pure but for everyday people. Energy is to be found in the tiniest things man encounters in his path; the world is the true classroom, the Love Supreme knows you are alive and will teach you all you need to know.”¹⁰ Paulo starts finding some special purpose on this trip. He finds himself fearless to know something unknown in the complete silence of the place. The places he visits with his ex-girlfriend, force him to praise the grace of Grace. On viewing the natural sculptures shaped by the wind in Vila Velha, Paulo is left mesmerized. He starts looking for something beyond rationale mind, something beyond human powers. Soon after the ecstasy of such a superhuman visualization, Paulo and his girlfriend get imprisoned on wrong accusations and this horrific period of their lives changes them forever. This imprisonment turns into a sort of total surrender, surrender to the cops, surrender to the bad destiny, surrender to the all human wishes and finally surrender to the Supreme Being. Even in prison, Paulo often feels oneness with the Super Power as soon as his mind is emptied of everything and everyone. Though there is great panic, yet he gets enlightening rays. After being released as an innocent tourist, he endeavors hard to remove trembling and torturous memories. That is why, long after that, while travelling with an Argentinian on his way to the latest hippie trail, he says to him, “I’m performing an exorcism.”¹¹

During his effort to get rid of bad vibes from his life Paulo comes to know about the art of living under the stressful circumstances, as ‘we don’t choose the things that happen to us, but we can choose how we react to them’.¹² He presses refresh button to put an end to the negativity of his past and settles on a plan of his next trip as the real fun in life is in taking risks only. In Rome, he lands among hippies once again. Hippies often gathered there at Piazza di Spagna, at the foot of Spanish Steps. There he buys bestseller of his generation, *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day*.

Karla, the lead female character in the story, a practical woman who meditates daily, first appears seated in the Dam Square, thinking about the guy who could accompany her on her magical adventure to Kathmandu. She is fond of reading and at present she is carrying, “*The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, a tale of mythic lands like those she intended to visit.”¹³ Solitude. Her greatest pleasure. The origin of her dream of traveling to Nepal was to find a cave and remain their alone until her teeth fell out, her hair became white, the local villagers stopped bringing her food; spending her final sunset looking at the snow, nothing more.”¹⁴ Though the Dam is famous for a Phallic Monument which symbolizes courage and virility yet she finds great difficulty in convincing anybody to accompany her to a far off adventurous land. Hippies she meets there are scared to cross the borders because of being trapped for drugs. To smoke marijuana and to remain in a euphoric state are

deemed their special traits, side-by-side, it draws for them troubles unlimited. Here in Europe, "Far from their families' never-ending laments, they were now free people, Europe was a safe place (as long as they didn't get any ideas and cross the famous Iron Curtain to "invade" some Communist country..."¹⁵ So, they make excuses to cross the border with Karla by bus.

Before embarking on this exploration, Karla falls in love with a Frenchman in Paris and then with a sailor from Bombay who 'in addition to being an excellent lover (something she rarely encountered), led her to discover Eastern mysticism. It was then that she began to consider that her ultimate destiny in life was to travel far away, live in a cave in the Himalayas, keep the faith that gods would come speak to her one day or another, free herself from everything that surrounded her at that moment and that she found boring, so boring.'¹⁶ She feels a dire need to 'discover a country within herself or without that she'd never explored before and find a way past the tedium that she would feel draining her strength with each passing day.'¹⁷ She needs a companion who could give her company on her journey to unknown regions, to virgin lands. And finally, according to the predicted time of clairvoyant Layla, she meets Paulo-her daring someone.

Both feel a sort of romantic connection, both are in search of something beyond their imagination, both are looking for unknown, both want freedom but in different ways. Paulo is sure that he is born to be free and can survive in this way. He wants to become a writer to show people what they cannot see. And he is determined to do so. Fortunately, he starts meeting people of the similar vein. He comes in contact with a Brazilian couple, Tiago and Tabita who consider themselves Children of God. Also, sweet touch of Karla in his life leaves him spellbound. Karla too starts seeing Paulo as an ideal companion for her journey to Kathmandu on the Magic Bus. She tries to convince Paulo to be with her on this spiritual journey. But it is difficult for Paulo to make up his mind for crossing the border as it could be a consciously made mistake. Whatever their destiny is, Karla and Paulo start spending time together.

Meanwhile, several future knitting incidents happen in their lives. Paulo meets people from Hare Krishna group, who enchant mantra *Hare Krishna, Hare Ram* repeatedly along with singing and dancing to empty their minds and to allow space for Supreme energy.

As it is very true that one's vibe attracts one's tribe so Paulo feels like joining the Krishna devotees. On the other hand, Karla thinks she has already had her Hare Krishna Phase. Even then she goes with him as Paulo doesn't want to lose her.

“...the two of them had come together for some mysterious reason, a mystery that needed to be kept intact- never understood, but maintained.”¹⁸

This Hare Krishna procession reminds Paulo of a childhood story, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. The mantra, music and moving steps cast a spell on everyone, works as a sort of drug to clear one’s mind.

As Paulo is willing to gain more and more experiences to make best decisions in his life, Karla leaves him on a door without any number on the way back from the dancing procession. Paulo enters it to satisfy some morbid curiosity. He sits next to some oldish young man who tells him about the kiss of the needle, injecting heroine and explains:

‘what everyone else calls pain is our prelude to finding something all of you will never understand.’¹⁹

He discusses after effects of all types of drugs, maybe these lead to some sort of paradise. Paulo is interested in the talk as he wants to pursue his career in writing and he is looking for some idea or at least a phrase to begin with. And finally, real intentions of the occupants of the place are revealed when Paulo is about to leave from there. He is offered a sound amount of five thousand dollars to transport drugs to England which Paulo ultimately rejects because he doesn’t want to make people land in such a disastrous paradise.

On the parallel, Karla is also on the way to paradise but this paradise is on the earth and is called Kathmandu. Its nickname is **Shangri-la**, which means the valley of paradise. Suddenly, Paulo changes his mind from Piccadilly Circus to Shangri-la and agrees to accompany Karla. Because “God’s love is stronger than the reasons that led us to Him. Paulo believed this with every fiber of his soul.”²⁰ On the Magic Bus, they meet people with similar adventurous minds, who carry untold stories and ideas inside them. They have quality conversations with Rayan and Mirthe. Rayan beautifully explains them the meaning of **parallel reality** in the following words:

“That spiritual state that takes over your body and soul when you feel happy, your heart filled with love. Suddenly, everything that’s part of your daily life takes on a new meaning; colors become more vibrant, what bothered you before-like cold, rain, solitude, study, work- everything seems new. Because, for at least a fraction of a second, you’ve entered the soul of the universe and tasted the nectar of the gods.”²¹

An old fellow Jacques is also among them who is accompanying his daughter. Her daughter achieves everything in life yet unsatisfied, so decides to travel the world and live in a far-off place. "The two of them thirsted for the Everlasting."²² Moreover, a Pair of under- eighteen girls also accompany them who seem to be fleeing from their house.

During breaks on their journey, looking at the stars studded sky before sleeping, they feel eternity and infinity, they speak with the silence. Ahead they stop at a river.

*"Everyone became excited by the idea of taking off all their clothes, the absolute freedom, this connection to nature without any intermediaries."*²³

Hippies are shown here as pilgrims because they hate standing still. Paulo says,

*"If we stay quiet for an hour, we'll begin to hear God, Paulo thought to himself. But if we cry out with joy, God will also hear us and come down to bless us."*²⁴

After crossing all the Republics of Yugoslavia, they reach Istanbul. There Paulo gets fascinated with Sufis, their twirling skirts around them while dancing which "wasn't merely a dance but a way of speaking with God."²⁵ Sufism recognizes a single truth: nothing is divisible, the visible and the divisible are one,...²⁶ And "...nearly all of the wisdom of Sufism is not to be found in sacred texts, but in stories, prayers, dance, and contemplation."²⁷ Sufism influences Paulo to such an extent that he decides to become disciple of Sufism and leaves the journey with Karla in between. Though they make love to each other with the purest mind and intentions and feel for each other as they never felt before for anyone in their lives yet they couldn't continue their journey together. Paulo decides to leave and Karla just smiles and says, "When I'm in Nepal I'll be loving you. When I return to Amsterdam, I'll be loving you. When I finally fall for someone else, I'll be continue loving you, even if in a different way from today."²⁸

They part with a famous line from *Casablanca* in Paulo's mind that "We'll always have Paris."²⁹ They part to reach that spot in life which they think is their ultimate destination in destiny. But they could never know the happiest time spent together is in actual something, they are looking for all on their journey of life. They part with perfumed memories in their hearts in search of something unknown. Maybe Karla knows that she has found what she wants to, but Paulo is still doubtful. That is why he decides to separate which he soon regrets. After leaving Karla, he abandons the idea of joining Sufism and moves back to his place. Realization which he wants,

comes very late. He never hears again from Karla, and just seizes the moments spent with her. After becoming a famous writer when he visits Amsterdam again for a conference, he can't help himself and asks during Conference: "Karla, are you here?"³⁰ But maybe she is not ready to move on the old tracks as new wonders are offered at every turn. Love remains in their souls forever. This is the spirituality one can attain in this materialistic world, this is the biggest blessing. Paulo, Karla and many other characters choose hippie life, hippie style to attract mystical vibes.

References:

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