

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Paulo Coelho as a Feminist Writer

This research has been undertaken with the aim of proving Athena's struggle to establish her identity in Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello*. The research tool used to conduct this research is Feminism. Feministic perspectives presented on different novels of Coelho have subtly been studied to present Coelho as a feminist writer.

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio in 1947, as the son of Pedro Queima Coelho de Souza, an engineer and Lygia, a homemaker. Early on, Coelho dreamed of an artistic career, something frowned upon in his middle-class household. In the austere surroundings of a strict Jesuit school, Coelho discovered his true vocation: to be a writer. Coelho's parents, however, had different plans for him. When their attempts to suppress his devotion to literature failed, they took it as a sign of mental illness. When Coelho was seventeen, his father took him to a mental institution, where he endured sessions of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), a therapy that uses a current of electricity through the forehead. From this experience during his time in the mental hospital, he wrote a piece called *Veronika Decides to Die*, a novel with rich symbolism about a girl who tried to commit suicide.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, besides the touching story about spiritual self-searching, there are different things that are related to feminist theories that uniquely depict in the writing of a male author. Since the beginning of the novel, Coelho already shows the different nature of femininity and masculinity as shown in the book: "Shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, none of these options suited her feminine nature. Women, when they kill themselves, choose far more romantic methods

like slashing their wrists or taking an overdose of sleeping pills” (3). Based on this quotation, we can see that Veronika is positioned as a feminine character. The act of taking sleeping pills reflect femininity because it is less daring than shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, etc. Shooting or jumping involves adrenalin rush, while in the text Coelho writes that slashing their wrists or taking an overdose pills as far more romantic way to kill oneself than shooting, jumping, or hanging, as if woman is less daring than man to attempt suicide by doing an adrenalin rush act. This ‘romantic act’ is associated with woman, and in *Veronika Decides to Die*; a death because of taking overdose sleeping pills is described as a feminine act. Therefore we can conclude that there are difference characteristics of femininity and masculinity in the novel, and this different natural characteristic leads to the patriarchal social assumption that “masculinity is superior to femininity” (Tong 190).

Paulo Coelho’s bestseller *The Witch of Portobello* is one of the most widely read books in the world. The writings of Paulo Coelho give us a sense of conversation. We get the sense that a person whose experience is similar to us is sharing his experience with us, and instructing us the right way of life. The writings of Coelho can be understood more by the words of Eisinger. He writes, "This is the reason behind the fame of Coelho which he has achieved by using only those people as character which he himself has lived" (145).

*The Witch of Portobello* is the story of Athena who was born in Transylvania to a Romani mother, who is orphaned and later adopted by a wealthy Lebanese couple. The novel has strongly tried to speak the female voice and show how females’ position has been ignored by the religious side. Coelho himself claims he has tried to explore the

feministic perspectives inside this works. By the end of this novel he gives a brief summary of the whole novel:

It's difficult to sum up a book, but I would say that in *The Witch of Portobello* I wanted to explore the feminine side of divinity, I wanted to plunge into heart of the Great Mother. I felt the need to question why society had tried to lock away the feminine side of God (335).

On the basis of these lines quoted from last part of *The Witch of Portobello* , it can easily be said that Coelho wants to explore how our society has neglected the feminine side of God. He means that our society does not give due respect to female. Coelho portrays the dreadful pictures of women who are badly ignored by the male dominated society. Coelho tries to interpret the word 'witch' in a positive way by linking witchcraft to the struggle of getting freedom. According to him; females have been discriminated by the society since long and witches are those women who want to speak against the prejudices they have been facing. He explains in this novel:

But why explore the Feminine side of God? People sometimes ask me if I believe in witches, to which I always answer, 'I do.' Unfortunately the 'witch' still awakens many prejudices. To me, a witch is a woman who is capable of letting her intuition take hold of her actions, who communes with her environment, who isn't afraid of facing challenges. In my latest novel, I talk precisely about the prejudice that witches face in modern society. (335)

Similarly he is more conscious on the role of Athena in the novel. He clearly mentions that she is the mouthpiece of Coelho and incorporates his compassionate feminine side.

The character of Athena, with her freedom and courage, was my way to tackle this subject and to unveil the shackles of dogma. Flaubert once said that he was Madame Bovary; well I am my books and they are part of my soul. My characters allow me to explore my soul since they incarnate all my doubts and hopes. Athena embodies my feminine side, my compassionate side (336).

From the beginning of human civilization, women are dominated and ill treated according to the deep-rooted patriarchal rules and regulations. Society has been formed by the male oriented notion that has kept women in the inferior position. Social norms and values, behaviors and all other aspects of the society are controlled and guided by the male authority. Men use their so-called superiority to dominate social, political, cultural, economic and religious aspects. In such society, power passes from male to male not to female, such as father to son. Daughters are not given any roles and women are not given any opportunities to uplift them. Rather they are forced to accept the male ideologies. Coelho has tried to justify this artistically in his novel *Brida* in a context as follows:

May she [Virgin Mary] bless us because we are women and live in a world in which men love and understand us more and more. Yet still we bear on our bodies the marks of past lives, and those marks still hurt.

May the Virgin Mary free us from those marks and put an end forever to our sense of guilt. We feel guilty when we go out to work because we're leaving our children in order to earn money to feed them. We feel guilty when we stay at home because it seems we're not making the most of our

freedom. We feel guilty about everything, because we have always been kept far from decision-making and from power (103).

Aristotelian concept in the heroic figure is only male. According to this concept females are impossible to be presented as heroic figures like male. But Coelho has challenged this concept. His novels portray the female heroes to attack the society, which neglects females for their supremacy. In most of his novels, women have been shaped as heroic characters with autonomous power to strengthen the females in the society.

Paulo Coelho is a feminist writer in the sense that he vigorously advocates and hankers after female spiritual liberation. He has not only emphasized his beliefs and conceptions in his writings but also he has taken into account the ideas of feminine individualism and personal autonomy at the twentieth first century. His feminist approach is quite different from the contemporary feminists who primarily concern about the social elevation of women but he has craved an understanding of individual sovereignty by penetrating into the conventional needs and wants in the male domain of social life. Coelho 's idea of feminist emancipation is not limited and of debase nature. His approach is not restricted to physical liberation but he broadened it to intellectual as well socio-cultural autonomy. He was of the view that psychological and intellectual emancipation is the primary requisite that would bring forward the social and physical freedom. Social standing of females was a favourite subject to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Society was dominated by patriarchy, male chauvinism and supremacy whereas women were perceived as fragile and dependent.

Since this world famous novel has been studied, analyzed and interpreted from different perspectives, different critics have commented on his work with wide ranging

responses. He is widely acclaimed for his perpetual polish, splendid explanation of natural support. His use of language is deceptively simple. His use of imagery, metaphoric expressions and the use of aphorism are extremely vivid and effective. Though wide varieties of criticisms are made about this novel *The Witch of Portobello*, there are many fields about this text, which remain unexplored. The feministic study is one of them. I will be going through feministic study in *The Witch of Portobello* by the theoretical modality of feminism.

This thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first one is an introduction, which discusses the incidents and evidences to prove Paulo Coelho as a feminist writer. The second chapter provides a theoretical basis for the analysis of the text. It primarily consists of a discussion on the definition of feminism, and its historical background. The third chapter analyses the text in detail on the basis of the theoretical modality developed in the preceding chapter. It proves the hypothesis by bringing some evidences from the text. The last chapter, as the conclusion, summarizes the argument and ideas presented in the textual analysis.

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Paulo Coelho as a Feminist Writer

This research has been undertaken with the aim of proving Athena's struggle to establish her identity in Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello*. The research tool used to conduct this research is Feminism. Feministic perspectives presented on different novels of Coelho have subtly been studied to present Coelho as a feminist writer.

Paulo Coelho was born in Rio in 1947, as the son of Pedro Queima Coelho de Souza, an engineer and Lygia, a homemaker. Early on, Coelho dreamed of an artistic career, something frowned upon in his middle-class household. In the austere surroundings of a strict Jesuit school, Coelho discovered his true vocation: to be a writer. Coelho's parents, however, had different plans for him. When their attempts to suppress his devotion to literature failed, they took it as a sign of mental illness. When Coelho was seventeen, his father took him to a mental institution, where he endured sessions of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), a therapy that uses a current of electricity through the forehead. From this experience during his time in the mental hospital, he wrote a piece called *Veronika Decides to Die*, a novel with rich symbolism about a girl who tried to commit suicide.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, besides the touching story about spiritual self-searching, there are different things that are related to feminist theories that uniquely depict in the writing of a male author. Since the beginning of the novel, Coelho already shows the different nature of femininity and masculinity as shown in the book: "Shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, none of these options suited her feminine nature. Women, when they kill themselves, choose far more romantic methods

like slashing their wrists or taking an overdose of sleeping pills” (3). Based on this quotation, we can see that Veronika is positioned as a feminine character. The act of taking sleeping pills reflect femininity because it is less daring than shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, etc. Shooting or jumping involves adrenalin rush, while in the text Coelho writes that slashing their wrists or taking an overdose pills as far more romantic way to kill oneself than shooting, jumping, or hanging, as if woman is less daring than man to attempt suicide by doing an adrenalin rush act. This ‘romantic act’ is associated with woman, and in *Veronika Decides to Die*; a death because of taking overdose sleeping pills is described as a feminine act. Therefore we can conclude that there are difference characteristics of femininity and masculinity in the novel, and this different natural characteristic leads to the patriarchal social assumption that “masculinity is superior to femininity” (Tong 190).

Paulo Coelho’s bestseller *The Witch of Portobello* is one of the most widely read books in the world. The writings of Paulo Coelho give us a sense of conversation. We get the sense that a person whose experience is similar to us is sharing his experience with us, and instructing us the right way of life. The writings of Coelho can be understood more by the words of Eisinger. He writes, "This is the reason behind the fame of Coelho which he has achieved by using only those people as character which he himself has lived" (145).

*The Witch of Portobello* is the story of Athena who was born in Transylvania to a Romani mother, who is orphaned and later adopted by a wealthy Lebanese couple. The novel has strongly tried to speak the female voice and show how females’ position has been ignored by the religious side. Coelho himself claims he has tried to explore the



feministic perspectives inside this works. By the end of this novel he gives a brief summary of the whole novel:

It's difficult to sum up a book, but I would say that in *The Witch of Portobello* I wanted to explore the feminine side of divinity, I wanted to plunge into heart of the Great Mother. I felt the need to question why society had tried to lock away the feminine side of God (335).

On the basis of these lines quoted from last part of *The Witch of Portobello* , it can easily be said that Coelho wants to explore how our society has neglected the feminine side of God. He means that our society does not give due respect to female. Coelho portrays the dreadful pictures of women who are badly ignored by the male dominated society. Coelho tries to interpret the word 'witch' in a positive way by linking witchcraft to the struggle of getting freedom. According to him; females have been discriminated by the society since long and witches are those women who want to speak against the prejudices they have been facing. He explains in this novel:

But why explore the Feminine side of God? People sometimes ask me if I believe in witches, to which I always answer, 'I do.' Unfortunately the 'witch' still awakens many prejudices. To me, a witch is a woman who is capable of letting her intuition take hold of her actions, who communes with her environment, who isn't afraid of facing challenges. In my latest novel, I talk precisely about the prejudice that witches face in modern society. (335)

Similarly he is more conscious on the role of Athena in the novel. He clearly mentions that she is the mouthpiece of Coelho and incorporates his compassionate feminine side.

The character of Athena, with her freedom and courage, was my way to tackle this subject and to unveil the shackles of dogma. Flaubert once said that he was Madame Bovary; well I am my books and they are part of my soul. My characters allow me to explore my soul since they incarnate all my doubts and hopes. Athena embodies my feminine side, my compassionate side (336).

From the beginning of human civilization, women are dominated and ill treated according to the deep-rooted patriarchal rules and regulations. Society has been formed by the male oriented notion that has kept women in the inferior position. Social norms and values, behaviors and all other aspects of the society are controlled and guided by the male authority. Men use their so-called superiority to dominate social, political, cultural, economic and religious aspects. In such society, power passes from male to male not to female, such as father to son. Daughters are not given any roles and women are not given any opportunities to uplift them. Rather they are forced to accept the male ideologies. Coelho has tried to justify this artistically in his novel *Brida* in a context as follows:

May she [Virgin Mary] bless us because we are women and live in a world in which men love and understand us more and more. Yet still we bear on our bodies the marks of past lives, and those marks still hurt.

May the Virgin Mary free us from those marks and put an end forever to our sense of guilt. We feel guilty when we go out to work because we're leaving our children in order to earn money to feed them. We feel guilty when we stay at home because it seems we're not making the most of our

freedom. We feel guilty about everything, because we have always been kept far from decision-making and from power (103).

Aristotelian concept in the heroic figure is only male. According to this concept females are impossible to be presented as heroic figures like male. But Coelho has challenged this concept. His novels portray the female heroes to attack the society, which neglects females for their supremacy. In most of his novels, women have been shaped as heroic characters with autonomous power to strengthen the females in the society.

Paulo Coelho is a feminist writer in the sense that he vigorously advocates and hankers after female spiritual liberation. He has not only emphasized his beliefs and conceptions in his writings but also he has taken into account the ideas of feminine individualism and personal autonomy at the twentieth first century. His feminist approach is quite different from the contemporary feminists who primarily concern about the social elevation of women but he has craved an understanding of individual sovereignty by penetrating into the conventional needs and wants in the male domain of social life. Coelho 's idea of feminist emancipation is not limited and of debase nature. His approach is not restricted to physical liberation but he broadened it to intellectual as well socio-cultural autonomy. He was of the view that psychological and intellectual emancipation is the primary requisite that would bring forward the social and physical freedom. Social standing of females was a favourite subject to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Society was dominated by patriarchy, male chauvinism and supremacy whereas women were perceived as fragile and dependent.

Since this world famous novel has been studied, analyzed and interpreted from different perspectives, different critics have commented on his work with wide ranging

responses. He is widely acclaimed for his perpetual polish, splendid explanation of natural support. His use of language is deceptively simple. His use of imagery, metaphoric expressions and the use of aphorism are extremely vivid and effective. Though wide varieties of criticisms are made about this novel *The Witch of Portobello*, there are many fields about this text, which remain unexplored. The feministic study is one of them. I will be going through feministic study in *The Witch of Portobello* by the theoretical modality of feminism.

This thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first one is an introduction, which discusses the incidents and evidences to prove Paulo Coelho as a feminist writer. The second chapter provides a theoretical basis for the analysis of the text. It primarily consists of a discussion on the definition of feminism, and its historical background. The third chapter analyses the text in detail on the basis of the theoretical modality developed in the preceding chapter. It proves the hypothesis by bringing some evidences from the text. The last chapter, as the conclusion, summarizes the argument and ideas presented in the textual analysis.

### **Chapter III: Struggle for Identity in *The Witch of Portobello***

#### ***The Witch of Portobello* in Brief**

Paulo Coelho, one of the most read novelists, presents a female protagonist in his novel *The Witch of Portobello* who is in search of her identity in the society. Athena is the central figure in the novel. She is such a character who represents all the females who are struggling for their identity through many experiments. All the activities of Athena are focused at finding out her true identity. Instead of living a contented life with continuity her job and getting married to her boy friend, she sets out to find answers to the classical question of "Who am I?" through many experiences to establish her true self. This research has been focused at Athena's relentless struggle throughout her life for establishing her true identity.

The *Witch of Portobello* is written in the form of a biographical inquiry. There are fifteen narrators, who tell their stories about Athena. Athena was born as an illegitimate child in Romania. Her mother (Liliana), who is a Gypsy, leaves her child in an adoption centre. "A week later, as soon as the sun rose, I went to an adoption center in Sibiu and placed her on the doorstep, hoping that some charitable person would take her in" (134). Later a Lebanese couple (Samira and her husband) adopts her. Athena and her parents have to leave Lebanon due to the civil war, and they move to London. While studying at university Athena meets Lukas and soon gets married to him. A short time after getting married, she feels that she needs to become a mother and she follows her intuition. She gives birth to a boy, yet she is not able to stay married and gets divorced. As she was raised as a Christian, she visits the Church on a regular basis. When Father Fontana refuses to give Athena communion, because she is a divorced woman, she abandons the

Church. She works in a bank in London. Pavel, her landlord, introduces her to dance as a spiritual act. This takes her a step further in her quest to fill her blank spaces and when she moves to Dubai to work for a real estate company, she meets Nabil who teaches her the art of calligraphy. When she goes to Romania to find her birthmother, she meets Heron, and Deidre (Edda). Deidre becomes Athena's teacher and helps her to connect with the mother goddess (St Sarah). Back in London Athena shares her gift with the public and also adopts a spiritual student, Andrea McCain. The Church is disturbed by Athena's public display of spirituality. She is criticized and protested publicly by Rev. Ian Buck and fellows who claims they are the true followers of the Christ. She does not intimidate by Buck's protest campaign. She continues her spiritual exercises. The government official probes on her activities. They do not find any illegal element linked to her activities. Her fame spreads across the city. Her followers increase. They gather and encourage her to continue her campaign. They also ask her the solutions of their different problems. She provides it through her spiritual exercises. Some days later of these incidents she is found brutally murdered.

Many people in the city become her followers. They have a good faith on her that she is their friend during the time of difficulties. They believe she could give solution of their every problem. With this hope, they join the regular celebration; present their problems before her. The following line is sufficient to prove this. "When she arrived, she was received with applause, handwritten notes and requests for help" (275). Though she is found suspiciously murdered, till that time of period she is successful to create her position in her society as a successful spiritual leader.

### **Athena and Her Struggle for Her Identity**

While we go through the novel, we know that the focus of the novel is toward spiritual redemption of Athena. But core objective of *The Witch of Portobello* is not awakening new sensations for the search of ultimate spiritual freedom; it is rather Athena's quest for her unknown identity, being a Romanian orphan, brought up in Lebanese family. This can be examined through the support of these lines from the novel:

“The truth was, though, that a friend of the family, in a moment of malice, had called her 'an ungrateful orphan' and put her lack of manners down to the fact that she was 'not her parents' 'real' daughter'. She had hurled an ashtray at him, cutting his face. ” (32).

Athena took this remark as a big attack to her inner self. This incident could be decisive for setting a journey in search of her true identity. Because it is people's nature s/he cannot live without his/ her identity.

Athena is a revolutionary girl who aims to free and establish female's self-identity and freedom as men have in the society. She does not like the discrimination between men and women. She believes that males and females are the equal human beings and must get chance to enjoy equality. She thinks both male and female have their identity, which they love as much as their lives. According to this excerpt it can be said that she feels discriminated because she is a female. So she revolts against throwing the astray to that boy. In short, Athena is a feminist who struggles for the self- identity and freedom of the women.

Athena never shows her agreement with the patriarchal norms and values, which are obstacles for the autonomous self-identity of women. Such representation of women as a heroic figure in the novel is Coelho's way of strengthening them to act forward so

that to get a proper place in a society. Athena has a strong believe that female are independent as male to make any decisions regarding their life. She shows it by leaving her university in the middle of the semester. “One day, after almost a semester of equations, calculations and structural studies, she announced that she was going to leave university” (34).

She challenges her contemporary society deciding to get married and have a child at the age of nineteen. “The following day, she didn’t turn up for class. At our following meeting, I asked what she was going to do. I’m going to get married and have a baby’ ” (35). Not only that she easily accepts the divorce with her husband and starts living her single life with her son. Leaving university in the middle of the semester, getting married at the age of nineteen and give birth to a baby, then accept the divorce from her husband and live a single life with a baby son is not simple matter. Actually it is her strategy to prove that females are also free to make their own decision as males and able to live their lives independently in the society.

Athena even links her personal interests and hobbies towards establishing her identity. She joins the dance group in her landlord’s apartment where every day they would dance. She uses dance as a way of getting in touch with something stronger and more powerful than herself. She is trying to denote her true identity here, which is more significant to her than her live. She accepts dance is the symbol of freedom. “Yes, when I dance, I’m a free woman, or, rather, a free spirit who can travel through the universe, contemplate the present, divine the future, and be transformed into pure energy” (61). Life has meaning and everybody in this earth has some reasons. We have to understand that. “Then we can laugh at our sufferings, large and small, and walk fearlessly, aware



that each step has meaning. We can let ourselves be guided by the light emanating from the Vertex ” (62). The Vertex, here, tries to give the meaning of the identity of an individual. “The Vertex is hidden inside us, and we can reach it if we accept it and recognize its light ” (62). In a question to Athena by her landlord if she joined their dance group in search of love. Her answer was- “That would be a perfectly good reason, I think, but the answer is “No”. I came in search of a meaning for my life ” (66).

Therefore she always tries to search the meaning of life through creating her identity wherever she goes and whatever she does. She is firm in her believe that women also can live their lives as effectively as males in our society. In her work at bank, she becomes popular among other working staffs and equally she contributes in increasing the bank’s productivity. In the words of her bank manager:

Her efficiency increased, even though her workload remained unchanged. Her colleagues, who, up until then, had never exchanged more than a ‘Good morning’ or a ‘Goodnight’ with her, started asking her out to lunch. When they came back, they seemed very pleased, and the department's productivity made a giant leap (72-73).

It is because of her one and only objective to achieve her identity through each and every step she takes in her life. Becoming popular among her fellow workers shows female have capacity to maintain social relation. However, her contribution in increasing productivity in her workplace easily proves female workers’ ability to work as equal as male workers. It is also a good satire to contemporary society that discriminates women on the wedge for the same works.

Athena is not like general women who just stay inside their home, look after their children and watch serials on television. She is not passive woman, but a very active one. She has courage to do all things. It means, she is talented in every field and everywhere. She has not only outer beauty, also inner one. Her activities in every field show us and point out her quest for self-identity. She wants to link her works for showing that women are also capable as men. When Athena moves to Dubai and starts her professional career; she does not continue dance as in the bank in London. There she devotes herself to learn art of calligraphy and tries to make her identity through it. Her boss in Dubai appreciates Nabil who guides Athena learn calligraphy. “She’s an excellent person and attributes her qualities to what she’s learning from you. I’m thinking of giving her a share in the company. It might be a good idea to send my other sales staff to learn calligraphy, especially now that Athena is about to take a month’s holiday ” (98). These lines from the novel are enough to support that Athena has a strong desire for her familiarity as a female. She earns such familiarity through her devotion towards her works.

Athena always wants to do something that would help to find out the answer of classical question “Who am I?” She is professionally successful, she earns money as much needed and she can easily find her love and settle well. But she does not move through this line. She is quite unique girl who likes to find out her originality. She wants to know about her birth mother and the place where she was born. Athena’s mother and father could not sleep for a whole week when Athena decides to go in search of her birth mother. “We were bombarded with the same question: ‘Whereabouts in Romania was I born?’ ” (103) ? Samira, Athena’s mother consults the Psychiatrist. She wants to know

why Athena is always unhappy though she has everything. According to the psychiatrist everybody wants to know where we came from. It is natural for Athena too. He clarifies:

“ ‘We all want to know where we came from,’ he said. On the philosophical level, that’s the fundamental question for all human beings. In your daughter's case, I think it’s perfectly reasonable that she should want to go in search of her roots. Wouldn’t you be curious to know’ ”

(103)?

These lines explicitly tell that Athena must also have curiosity to know about her originality as everyone. She too wants to know about her real motherland. With this aim, she starts making plan to fulfill her desire. But here patriarchal mindset of the contemporary society tries to kill her desire. Samira, her mother, consults the psychiatrist on the surface level. Actually she does so from the side of her husband, the representation of patriarchal society. The core objective behind this is to stop Athena from going in search of her origin.

Series of incidents show that Athena was restless person and always wanted to fill her blank spaces. “I’ve always been a very restless person” (147). Her style of using the phrase ‘blank spaces’ means she is keen to create her place in the society where she lives. She tries to connect ‘blank space’ to the identity of an individual. According to her it is very important to find out the root of an individual. It is more important to the female since they are highly discriminated in the society. Athena’s father is settled in England. He has friends, earns plenty of money. He’s got security. Still he buys Lebanese newspapers and watch Lebanese TV Channels. It is because he is curious to know what’s going on in the country where he was born. He is doing this because if he is not in touch

with his roots, he feels as if he has lost everything in his life. But he has doubt over Athena who wants to do the same as what he is doing. She has a fear that if she is unable to do that. She is convinced her life is in vain if she is unable to find out her birth place, her mother and why she abandoned her. “If I don’t at least try and do that, I’ll feel like a coward and I won’t ever understand the blank spaces” (105).

Athena is a woman with different attitudes and behaviors than other women in the society. She is not afraid with the society to work whatever she likes though there was the chance to be out-cast from the society. During her visit to Transylvania, her motherland, she drinks alcohol that is forbidden among Gypsy women. “She orders a whisky. One of our women would never do that” (126). It is her big courage to revolt against the strict and traditional rules. She wants to show that females are free to do any works as males do in the society.

Athena is very much aware on her independence and the independence of all females. Especially she must have thought to do something that would make aware to the Gypsy women from whom she had come. She wants to convey the message in her motherland that every female should be free and live their lives as their willing. The tool she uses for this was dance. She also delivers the strong statement that is enough to spread the message regarding female independence. “She raised her arms in the air and cried: ‘when I die, bury me standing, because I’ve spent all my life on my knees’ ” (131)! Athena gives her stress at female freedom through this statement. She wants to explain that the freedom is precious for every human. If you have something you don’t feel the importance of it. When you lose something or if you don’t have the thing you want most.

It has more significance in your life. Same as this the females do not have freedom. So it is more precious to them.

Women are not free. They are bound everywhere. It is not taken easily if they like to search their identity. Many barriers are created to stop their mission. Even their family member may not give their company. In case of Athena too, her mother and father do not permit her at the beginning. But Athena is different female who is keen to know about her origin. She convinces and travels the strange land where she was born. She discovers her birth mother and consults about her root. “Who am I? What blood runs in my veins? Yesterday, when I found out where you were, I was absolutely terrified. Where do I start? I suppose, like all Gypsies, you can read the future in the cards” (140).

The major idea developed in this novel by Coelho is to explore the feminine side of the God. For many centuries, religion or the quest for the spiritual realm was linked to the male figures such as Brahma, Bishnu, Maheshwar in Hindu, Jesus Christ in Christian, Gautam Buddha in Buddhism, and Mohammad in Muslim religions. There are significant place of Goddesses in many religions but they are not exposed well. The focus on the feminine side of God has been shown in this novel.

Athena wants to change herself and establish her position in her society. So, she does not care about comments of people. She knows very well that if people do some extra-ordinary works in the society, they should face many problems. She has a mission in her life and she wants to take her life ahead with her mission. She has the opinion that women should do something and that could bring her position in the society. She is speaking the voice of those dominated women who could not come out breaking the rope by which they have been tied everywhere. She tries to convince her mother what she is

going to do is absolutely to fill up the blank spaces i.e. create her own identity in the society. She tries to convince her mother living the normal life is not the right way of living. Everyone in this world should try to find out the meaning of their lives. In case of women, it is most necessary to do this since they are doubly discriminated in the society. By telling all this she is about to deliver her mother she is going to do what all the so-called normal people would speak against it and give many negative comments. She is thinking to practice witchcraft so that at least people would know about her. This shows she is totally focused at her mission to be recognized by the people to her as a female. “I feel that I have a mission. While we were celebrating life and nature, I discovered things I didn’t even know existed. What I thought could be found only through dance is everywhere. And it has the face of a woman” (151).

Freedom is highly precious to everyone. Each and every person in this earth wants to live his or her lives freely without any kind of interferences from anywhere. The adventure of being alive could be achieved through being free. Deidre O’Neill, known as Edda to search her identity and live an independent life, must have impressed Athena. She must have learnt from Edda to see life through own eyes.

It’s simple because all it takes is a change of attitude: I’m not going to look for happiness any more. From now on, I’m independent; I see life through my eyes and not through other people’s. I’m going in search of the adventure of being alive” (155-156).

Edda is a character in the novel who visits Athena’s motherland Transylvania. According to her she wants to meet her teacher from whom she has learnt the spiritual practice, which she is thinking to teach to Athena. Athena meets Edda in Transylvania

and is impressed after they exchange their ideas regarding life. Edda wants to share her knowledge and skills to a suitable woman. So she is in search of a woman who is different and has aim to do something innovative in her life. When she meets Athena, a ray of hope is aroused in her heart. She starts dialogues with Athena. After a series of discussion with her, Edda is happy to know Athena is not an ordinary woman who fears to accept challenges. She believes Athena is able to create her free identity and live independent life by getting spiritual learning from her. She believes Athena does not misuse the knowledge and skills against humanity. She feels safe and secured with Athena's way of thinking.

I was sure she would listen to me, mainly because she was the kind of person who never refuses a challenge.

'Teach people to be different. That's all!' I shouted after her, as the taxi moved off. That is joy. Happiness would be feeling satisfied with everything she already had – a lover, a son, a job. And Athena, like me, wasn't born for that kind of life (161-162).

Athena learns magic or we can say spiritual practice with aim of finding her recognition in her society. She is happy to learn it. Similarly she has the power to convince other women how they are losing their identity and living under domination. As her teacher Edda, she always asks her pupils focus themselves to be different. "Try to be different. That's all'" (177). She applies this power on a theatre actress Andrea McCain, who comes to her know about the great Mother worshiped by the Gypsies. Andrea is learning about the Mother since she is working on a play about the female face of God. During the conversation between them, Athena gives stress on the importance of their independence in the society. She delivers her views that practicing witchcraft is not the

spiritual exercises for gaining exotic powers. In real sense it is the expression of outrage of whole women community who are bearing the repression from centuries. So becoming the witch is the best way of recovering their lost identity. Slowly and gradually Athena is able to provoke the feelings on Andrea that she also starts thinking about her position in her community.

Who, as a young woman, hasn't been outraged by the centuries of repression suffered by women and felt that becoming a witch would be the best way of recovering her lost identity? I'd been through that phase myself; I was independent and did what I liked in the highly competitive world of the theatre, but then why was I never content? Why was I always testing out my curiosity (175) ?

Finally Andrea is transformed into one of the good company of her. She also starts asking question herself about her existence. Now she begins searching the reasons for not being content in her life. Actually it is Athena's success to provoke such feeling in the heart of her pupils. In this way, Athena is able to play a role of campaigner to make aware women on their independent position in the society.

In the same way, Athena tries to arouse the feelings of searching their self-identity to her followers by tracking the female face of God.

After millennia of male domination, we are returning to the cult of the Great Mother. The Greeks called her Gaia, and according to the myth, she was born out of Chaos, the void that existed before the universe. With her came Eros, the god of love, and then she gave birth to the Sea and the Sky (178-79).



Athena wants to explain that females are the creators and protectors. They are caring and loving in nature. They always like to care and protect their family members. They do not discriminate on any basis. But it is not their limitation. If needed, they can become destructor too. This way of explanation is Athena's strategy to challenge the male dominated society not to suppress females so that they could burst at once out bringing the vast destruction. She illustrates the example from Greek myths and gives stress that once there was such a situation in which the Great Mother created everything without the presence of males. She warns the male domination in symbolic way not to create such circumstances where females are compelled to think the society without males as in the Greek mythology. From this illustration they have tried to warn the males when the limit of repression is crossed then no time will be remained to the oppressor to think about outcomes.

But as man became established as the principal political power in the cities, Gaia was forgotten, and was replaced by Zeus, Ares, Apollo and company, all of whom were competent enough, but didn't have the same allure as the Mother who originated everything' (179).

Coelho presents the bitter reality in the novel about how males feel jealousy and create obstruction when they see some women are struggling to get their freedom. Since very long time ago males are dominating females and females are trying hard to get rid of this domination. It is said that women have developed the form of witchcraft to announce their struggle for freedom in a symbolic way. But males have interpreted it in a different way. They explain witchcraft in a negative way and claims it is practiced only to gain evil spirit on them and use it against humanity. Athena wants to prove all these claims are

only accusation. In reality women want their equal rights and position as the male members in the society. In this course, she gets a number of barriers by the male dominated society. The theatre director has insulted Athena when she was trying to deliver her message among a group of actress along with Andrea through giving a class on spiritual practices.

'With all due respect, Andrea, I thought the conversation in the bar about sex was far more interesting than the nonsense we've just been engaging in. Did you notice how she kept falling silent? She didn't know what to do next!'

'Did you? Are you sure?' Asked an actress, and judging by her words, she'd experienced the same thing. 'She's a bit of a witch, that woman,' said the director, interrupting the conversation (198).

This is just a glimpse how a male reacts when he sees a female doing something to establish herself in the society. Actually the theatre director is the representative male who doesn't like the independency of females. Such problems are structural and they rooted almost in every community. They are very hard but not impossible to overcome. Such barriers have been transferred from generation to generation since long time. Breaking them in a short span of time is impossible. Women need to run a long and relentless campaign for breaking such barriers. Equally the campaign should be run with the strong unity among every woman in a systematic way. As mentioned above lines Athena is not an ordinary woman who runs away from challenges. She always accepts and plays with challenges. In course of spreading her spiritual message, she has already won the heart of the group of actresses. "Athena wasn't like that, and I was determined to

see her again, especially after what the director had said about her ” (198). They are well convinced what Athena doing is absolutely right. She created positive feelings on them to her.

Athena’s struggle for establishing her true identity moves into peak when her spiritual exercises is disturbed by Rev. Ian Buck and his parishioners accusing her act as “the satanic cult at the heart of England” (269). As stated previously it is males’ natures that react aggressive with such events. They accuse women and say they are bringing evils in the society. Rev. Ian Buck here who openly blames Athena for invoking the Devil represents such character. He has double intentions on his remarks to her. First he wants to spread the message that Athena is trying to create insecurity in the city. He blames what Athena doing is totally wrong for the society. What she claims as she is the goddess of wisdom is also wrong. Next he wants her not to be able to raise her head in future making aware women looking their position in the society.

According to Rev. Buck, a group of suspicious individuals have been keeping the neighborhood awake every Monday night for the last six months, Monday being their chosen night for invoking the Devil. The ceremonies are led by a Lebanese woman, Sherine H. Khalil, who calls herself Athena, after the goddess of wisdom (269).

He makes a series of attack to Athena and her spiritual exercises using different ways. First he makes verbal complaints accusing her she is violating the norms and value of the society. Next he attacks her with petitions. Similarly he writes letters to the local newspapers explaining how Athena is doing practices of devil’s act. Any of his weapons do not work properly. These all accusation cannot move Athena from her stand. She is so

firmed to her mission and her followers have the strong believe towards her. So he is unable to get success in his plan to create disturbance and break her regular spiritual practices. Instead more people are informed on this and the number of her followers increase. Her fame is strengthened more than previous. Rev. Ian Buck and his followers are worried with this result. They do not think they would get such a result. Becoming more aggressive they look for other ideas that would be more effective for their objectives. After a careful consideration, they decide to protest by mobilizing local community. “When his various verbal complaints, petitions and letters to the local newspapers achieved nothing, the Rev. Buck decided to mobilize the community, calling on his parishioners to gather outside the warehouse by 1900 hours yesterday to stop the 'devil-worshippers' getting in” (270).

By using this strategy, Rev. Buck and his group conduct a protest campaign demanding to stop the activities of Athena immediately. As usual they accuse her act is devil worshipping. According them, it is creating insecurity to people. Thus their act is violating the rights of people to remain safe in the city. They act as if they are the true followers of Christ and it is only their own duty to make city peaceful being the. With regular protests, they make the government officials probe on the activities of Athena. They urge government officials maintain peace and security in the city. On the surface Buck's group is concerned with the peace and security of the city. They want to make free their city from evils. In reality they have problem with the existence of a woman. It is very hard to bear that a single lady instead of remain under the shadow of the male creates her fame in the society. That's why they create pressure to the government thinking it is safe for them if the government stopped her mission. Due to the series of

incidents for the same cause, the government starts investigating on it. After a careful study on the incidents, they prepare a report on it. Based on the facts found during the investigation, officials say:

'As soon as we received the first complaint, we sent someone to inspect the place, but no drugs were found nor evidence of any other kind of illicit activity,' said an official who preferred not to be identified because an inquiry has just been set up to investigate what happened. 'They aren't contravening the noise nuisance laws because they turn off the music at ten o'clock prompt, so there's really nothing more we can do. Britain, after all, allows freedom of worship' (270).

The government officials do not find anything that violates the rules of law but Rev. Therefore they are unable to take any action towards Athena and her groups as demanded by Buck's group. The officials clarify that it is their freedom of worship allowed by Britain's rules. But Rev. Buck does not want to listen the officials. He accuses officials that they have been influenced by the power of Athena. They claim Athena has link to the high officials in the government. Because of this link, they are not taking action towards her. Buck and his parishioners change their strategies of protest. They attack Athena and her followers in the name Jesus. Now they give the color of religion to their protests. Equally they ignore the teaching of Christ. They forget that Christ says all the creatures are equal and they are all god. They claim Athena is practicing such rituals that is against Christianity. They continue their protest which results into clashes.

'They say they're fighting in the name of Jesus, but what they really want is for people to continue to ignore the teachings of Christ, according to

which “we are all gods”,’ said the well-known actress Andrea McCain, one of Sherine Khalil or Athena's followers (271).

Though the protest has been transformed into violence Athena does not want to discontinue what she is doing. She thinks she is not doing anything wrong so she does not think to stop it. “Mrs. Khalil emphatically rejected any suggestion that she should stop the meetings because of the disturbances” (272). Rather she makes the defense what she was doing was not wrong but Mr. Buck’s activities are creating violence. For Buck’s accusations, she accused him of 'manipulating his parishioners and using intolerance. He is promoting violence. It is against the law. So their act is punishable. She claims she is following the Britain’s rules to practice any rituals freely. She believes it is her fundamental rights too. No one is above the rules of the nation so it is illegal to create obstacles to her.

These lines extracted above from *The Witch of Portobello* show how traditional male dominated society reacts when a lady tries to make her own position. Indeed it was Athena’s attempt to create her own free identity in the society. Buck is a representative character of male dominated society who does not like a female live with the dignity. He continuously protests it. The more he conducts protest campaign the more Athena’s fame gets spread. Having been outrage with this, he gives direct threat to stop her activities. In spite of big threat, she goes to the station for the next event on the following Monday.

On the positive side, the following Monday's meeting was one of the most successful events in the area's history: many local people came some curious to the ‘being’ mentioned in the article, others bearing placards defending freedom of religion and freedom of speech (275).

This day presents the evidence that Athena has been able to establish her identity in her society to some extent. Many people are gathered there being curious to see the events as mentioned in the article. Only two hundred people are able to get inside the place due to its capacity. Other people stay together on the pavement outside to support the event. Many of them have gathered demonstrating placards defending freedom of religion and freedom of speech. “The venue would only hold two hundred people and so the rest of the crowds were all crammed together on the pavement outside, hoping for at least a glimpse of the woman who appeared to be the priestess of the oppressed.” (275) It seems that they are feeling it is their luck if they get an opportunity of a glimpse of Athena. Actually this her success as a female to create her position by winning the heart of people. Why can women not lead the society? Coelho through Athena in *The Witch of Portobello* presents the answer.

The scene immediately after her arrival is notable to state here. She gets warm welcome from people. People have strong believes that Athena is their only friend who could remove the difficulties from their lives. They make requests to her for the solution of their problems. The important aspect presented by the audience to her is their faith on her. They want her to keep on fighting for women’s freedom. People like her as a freedom fighter for women’s emancipation. This is not a simple matter. It is her great victory to be able to win the heart of people.

“When she arrived, she was received with applause, handwritten notes and requests for help; some people threw flowers, and one lady of uncertain age asked her to keep on fighting for women’s freedom and for the right to worship the Mother” (276).

On the other hand, Buck's group moves back this week. They are unable to continue their protest campaign perhaps because of the crowd in favor with Athena. She faces no aggression. The ceremony passes off normally. As usual she dances as Hagia Sofia. It is the manifestation of her another facet. During this stage her followers ask her different question related to their difficulties. Turn in turn she explain on each of the problems and provide them the suitable solutions. She ends the ceremony with the final celebration. Then she is no more Hagia Sofia. She turns herself again in the form of Athena.

There were no aggressive comments, and the ceremony passed off as normal, with dancing, the appearance of Hagia Sofia (by then, I knew that she was simply another facet of Athena herself), and a final celebration (this had been added recently, when the group moved to the warehouse lent by one of its original members), and that was that (276).

Hundreds of followers attending the rituals performed by her, everywhere gossip about her, Rev. Buck and his parishioners' aggression, regular news coverage of her rituals by local newspapers, government officials' concern for her security management etc. prove that Athena is successful for establishing her position in her society. Similarly People's strong believes on her that she could be freedom fighter for women emancipation is one of significant achievements of her. Not only that her good image on people and believe on her that she could give the solutions for any kind of problems made her more popular. Her identity is an identity of a woman who dares to challenge the rule bound so called civilized society. She is a woman who does every work even these works are against the norms and conditions of her society. She does not care what other people



think of her. The only thing she has in her mind is to live life with her own wishes and expectations and take advantage of her freedom in proper time as every male does since the beginning of human civilization. Athena frequently suffers many troubles and comments but she easily ignores them and moves ahead. To get of it she starts avoiding comments and continues her works. She makes involved herself to get the real happiness and, therefore lives a real life. What she desires from her life is not prosperity and so called respect but a single and most important thing that is her true identity, an experience of reality.

In this way, Athena is successful to establish her identity among people, that's why, after many years of her death people remember her boldness and her tireless struggles. She is able to remain alive in them even after her death. Therefore it is justifiable to claim that Coelho, the novelist, is raising his voice for the freedom of women in general through the image of the bold and courageous lady protagonist.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

### Athena's Victory over Patriarchal Society

We all know that every individual desires for self-identity, a desire for self-recognition. They want social, political, psychological, economic independence in general. However, identity also evolves out of the person's free actions: to think one's own thought, to see and feel with one's heart and having no authority to govern except the authority of one's own reason. This liberty determines a person's individual space, authenticity and self dignity. Only in the exaltation of such liberty, a person can experience life and love to the fullest extent. The free play of these rights does not belong exclusively to one gender or another, for both the sexes struggle to maintain their own identity in the ever changing society. However, the society does place restriction on the basis of gender and put the fulfillment of female identity at stake. Since a long time in human history, woman's identity remained submerged, and pressurized under various guises like culture, religion and convention. The orientation of feminism is to help women overcome the state of inferiority and the lack of identity.

This research has analyzed Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello* from feminist point of view. It has studied the central character Athena's relentless struggle from childhood to her death for establishing her free identity in the patriarchal society. It is the hierarchy made between men and women by the patriarchal society that has marginalized women from enjoying the social position. For a long time women could not develop themselves for raising voice for their rights.

But gradually they started it. In this 21<sup>st</sup> Century number of conscious women have been raising questions against such discrimination and trying to stand on their own. To be

direct they are highly eager to create their position in the society. They are not only willing for their identity but also working for it too. Athena is a representative character of such female figures. Her entire life journey in the novel explicitly shows her strong desire to be something in her society. As a result, she turns herself as a spiritual leader of her city.

If we see in our contemporary society, still it can be easily seen that a girl child is taught by the mother to be silent, obedient and swallow from the infancy. More or less, it is the nature of every society. This forces girls to remain silent usually. This silence of woman kills her 'self'-the essence which holds and molds an individual together in order to form a complete organism.

The 'self' is the sense of individuality that supports the view that before anything else we are

human. A woman without self-identity is no more than an empty shell. The orientation of

feminism is to help women overcome the state of inferiority and the lack of identity.

It is patriarchal ideology of the male dominated society that restricts women walk freely and do as their desire. It binds women only remain inside the home and take care of her children.

They are restricted from enjoying and joining the different professions. The objective of such

rules is to transform them into puppet. Even most of the females under such male dominated

social structures are developed against female freedom. They speak for the existing society and want their daughters get married and bear children as they have done. Athena's mother in the novel has also attempted persuading her daughter to follow her, settle a family and live a happy life. But Athena is not as the general females. She does not follow every rules and regulations of the society as it is. She does everything as her intuition tells her.

Female heroism is one of the salient features of Coelho's writing. The necessity of female heroism in the literary texts is to keep female in social dignity. To bring women in the world of freedom and equality, it is necessary to give women the role of the protagonist in the literary texts and to help women to come in the open ground without hesitation.

Although Paulo Coelho is a male writer, his favour is completely with females. He has fully understood the women's status and their power in the society. That's why he can be taken as feminist writer. Thus the portrayal of Athena's struggle in *The Witch of Portobello* can be taken as a female's effort for creating equal status in the society. It can be concluded that Coelho has demonstrated Athena as a conscious, bold and courageous woman who fights for women's rights against patriarchal society. Her courage and behavior help her to challenge the patriarchal society and get victory over it in order to attain the autonomy and identity in her life.

## Works Cited

- Abhrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7<sup>th</sup>. ed. New Delhi: Harcourt, 1996.
- Arias, Juan. *Confessions of a Pilgrims*. Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. "The Second Sex." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt, 1992. 993-1000.
- Coelho, Paulo. *Brida*. New York: Harper Luxe, 2008.
- *Veronika Decides to Die*. New York: Harper Perennial. 2001.
- *The Witch of Portobello*. Hammersmith, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008.
- Dady, Hawkins Mark, ed. *Readers Guide to Literature in English*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1996.
- Eisinger, Chester E. "Coelho, Paulo." *Contemporary Novelists*. Illinois: St. James, 1999. 143-48.
- Freedman, Jane. *Feminism*. New Delhi: Villa Books, 2002.
- Marin, Louis. "Topic and Figures to Enunciation: It is Myself that I Paint." *Vision and Textuality*. Ed. Stephen Melville Bill Readings. London: Macmillan, 1995. 199-200
- Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in International Division of Labour*. London: Zed Books, 1986.
- Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. London: Granada Publishing, 1969
- Moil, Troil. "Feminist Literary Criticism." *Modern Literary Theory*. Eds. Jefferson and Robery. London: Bastford, 1988. 135.

Seldon, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Harvester, 1989.

Showalter, Elaine. "Towards a Feminist Poetics." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed.

Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt, 1992. 1223-33.

----- ed. "Feminist Criticism in Wilderness." *The New Feminist*

*Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. 256-257.

Tong, Rosemarie Putnam. *Feminist Thought: Pengantar Paling Komprehensif Kepada Arus*

*Utama Pemikiran Feminis*. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra. 2004

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Routledge, 2006

Woolf Virginia. "A Room of Our Own." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed.

Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt, 1992. 819-819.