

*S.Kanchana

Assistant Professor,

VNR Vignana Jyothi Institute of Engineering & Technology, Hyderabad

**Prativa Rani Saha

Assistant Professor

VNR Vignana Jyothi Institute of Engineering & Technology, Hyderabad

MADNESS AND DEATH IN PAULO COELHO'S VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE

Paulo Coelho's *Veronika Decides to Die*, narrates the story of Veronika, a beautiful young woman from Slovenia. The story is about the journey of Veronika's transformation from a depressed would-be suicide to an affirmed survivor. The protagonist was not happy with her life though she had everything, loving family, money, a fulfilling job etc. She always felt that her life lacked any purpose and the future seemed very worse. She was very sure that nothing can fill her void in life and decides to commit suicide by taking a handful of sleeping pills.

Coelho in this novel provides an exemplary story articulating hope, depicting a situation in which one can find freedom, joy, integrity and truth under limiting and most challenging circumstances. Coelho also explores the importance of living a real life and how closed communities and the rules of the society pose a threat to individual identity and freedom. Coelho also gives an insight into the societies which term the individual as mad when they fail to comply with the expectations of the society.

Veronica instead of dying, she awakens in a mental asylum and the nurses tell her that she has only one week to live as the pills had caused irreversible damage to her body. This realization about the situation changes Veronika's perception of life and death.

Villette, the mental asylum headed by a fascinating psychiatrist attempts provocative experiment. He decides to shock Veronica into wanting to live by making her believe that death is imminent. Dr. Igor's experiment accelerates Veronika's admiration of the world around her.

Villette is a sanctuary in the purest sense of the word as it serves as a place of protection, and especially the inmates are guarded from danger. From the book, the readers would understand that the danger is the society. The inmates do not comply with the rules of the society and are left with two choices. One is to succumb to the perception that they are mad, or fight against the society and find their own way in this world.

The protective walls of Villette provide freedom to the inmates encouraging them to be themselves and pursue their "madness" without any hinder or disapproval or criticism. The individuals discover the real "me". One would find the journey of Veronica as one of contemplation and also as an expression of compliance, suicidal and madness but towards the end one would find a bright discovery of the automatic and mechanical choices every individual makes each day between living and dying, dejection and freedom.

During her stay in "Villete", Veronika encounters Zedka, a lady suffering from depression. Zedka, who has been fanatical about her old lover strongly, believes that her old lover is still looking after her. In this turmoil she forgets her husband, children and a stable life.

Another powerful character is Mari, a lawyer by profession was admitted at Villete for depression. With the help of Dr. Igor, she overcomes her problem and when she's ready to go back to her normal married life, she was deprived of the job and her husband leaves her making her to stay at Villete. The society has forsaken her and if the people at her firm had been merciful, Mari would have had a beautiful life.

During a week stay at Villete, Veronika undergoes a lot of changes in her approach to death and senses the importance of being alive. Veronika who was pessimistic in her approach find a change in her belief system, attitude to life and everything positive about her personality. She becomes extemporaneous and articulates her weakness, anger, fear and her love without perturbing about other's feelings.

During her stay at Villete, all the patients were influenced by Veronika's presence and they too started looking at life from a different perspective and encouraged them to be themselves and think about their own life. Her approach to life even motivated them to respect their life and stimulated their courage to leave Villete and realize their dreams.

At the end of the novel, the reader discovers that Veronika didn't suffer from any damages Dr Igor's innovative approach and experiment to give a shock to Veronika worked out

and her realization that her life is short lived and the importance to live each and every moment of her remaining time made her to realize the value of her life she had. This experiment was fortunately successful because it helped Veronika to live and see the life and people in a new light.

Veronika represents a person who does not want to be the part of the mundane life as they would lose the originality and transform into a tragedy of life in which everything repeats and every day is similar to the other. The novel brings out the role of society in curtailing the individual interests and Paulo Coelho scripts his own experiences where his parents send him to asylum for not acquiescing to be an engineer instead a writer.

The society's refusal to be productive has termed her mad. The central theme is really sanity and the sanity is really in the hands of the beholder. As every society / organization brandishes the truth which is believed to be the reality and all the members are made to believe in it and make it a collective reality and that is regarded as the rational way of thinking.

A deeper dwelling of Veronica's life bring to light how she sacrificed her dream to be a pianist and turned her life to the whims of her parents and ended up as a librarian. She never liked or looked at her life from her point of view but she survived by living to the expectations of others and sacrificed her life to make some one's dream true.

In this era of instant gratification and the pressure to be successful, the individual let be a child goes through this trauma to be successful. The pleasure of learning things around you is suppressed by the parental or the societal demand to be more productive or successful. The individual freedom is curtailed. It is also evident from our ancient knowledge that creativity, truth, innovation has its origin in 'madness'. It is also true that the approach of our culture towards 'madness' only increases the limitations of humanity there by killing the souls of the individuals.

It is also important for an individual to be 'Mad' so that he/ she can involve, indulge and emerge victorious and can convince the world that is ok to be Mad. It is very crucial for the society to change the perspective of the stigma of madness. The individuals should try to be different and encourage other individuals to be different, pursue their own interests and it requires determination and courage to stand up to the society. It is also equally important to question the concepts of sanity and madness. The individuals and the society should truly

understand us, to embrace the fear to be ourselves. This is the key to Living rather than surviving.

Works cited

Coelho, Paulo. *Veronika Decides to Die*. London: HarperCollins, 1999. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. 1910. The Origin and the Development of Psychoanalysis. *American Journal of Psychology*.

Arias, J. (2001). *Paulo Coelho: Confessions of a pilgrim*. London, United Kingdom: Harper Collins.

Mayer, C.-H. (2017). *The life and creative works of Paulo Coelho: A psychobiography from a Positive Psychology perspective*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.