

Displacement of Elijah in *The Fifth Mountain*

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Abstract

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian lyricist and novelist. He is best known for his inspirational novels. In his writings, spirituality holds an important place. The Fifth Mountain (1996) is a personal legend of Elijah, a prophet of Israel. The protagonist's displacement for survival is the symbolic journey which shows his courage and strong will to survive even in the worst circumstances of life.

Elijah has to embark on a journey from his place in order to save his life, his religion, and his people. In spite of his trials and ordeals in a foreign land, he reaches his personal destiny. Coelho recreates a simple Biblical story and makes it an inspirational one. This paper is an attempt to study the protagonist's journey for survival. It focuses on Elijah's struggle to survive in a foreign land.

Key Words

Displacement, Survival, Personal legend, Inspirational

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Paulo Coelho was born in Brazil in 1947. He has received numerous international awards such as "World Economic Forum Crystal Award" in 1999 and "The Honorable Award of the President of the Republic" in May 2006. He has written numerous books like, *Hell Archives* (1982), *The Pilgrimage* (1987), *The Alchemist* (1988), *Brida* (1990), *The Valkyries* (1990), *Maktub* (1992), *By the River Piedra I Sat Down & Wept* (1994), *The Fifth Mountain* (1996), *The Manuel of the Warrior of Light* (1997), *Veronica Decides to Die* (1998), *The Devil and Miss Prym* (2000), *Eleven Minutes* (2003), *The Zahir* (2005), *Like the Flowing River* (2006), *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008), *Aleph* (2010), *Manuscript Found in Accra* (2012), *Adultery* (2014) *The Spy* (2016).

Displacement is as ancient as human history. It refers to both physical as well as mental displacement. Since the evolution of human being, they displace from one place to another for various purposes. It is much-debated term in the 21st century as people are moving from their original land to foreign land for various purposes. Coelho has traced the element of displacement in most of his works. Coelho himself is fond of travelling and he reveals; "Without a doubt, it was traveling that made me make the leap" (Arias,195). He also traces the importance of journey by saying, "Journey has a very strong symbolic significance in people's lives" (197). He further adds; "Using the metaphor of the journey, I see my life as a caravan: I don't know whence it came or where it's going to end" (210).

Coelho believes that one should realize one's destiny. His protagonists also believe in realizing their destinies. The journey of his protagonists follows the same pattern. His protagonists embark on a journey either for spiritual or material purposes, they go through trials and ordeals and reach to their destinies at the end. They have faith in God and his acts. It seems that they get clues from the universe during their journey, follow the omens and achieve their goals.

Coelho's Protagonists seem to believe in the following words:

"When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (Coelho, *The Alchemist*, 28).

As every journey has a motive, Coelho's protagonists too have motives for their journey. Santiago in *The Alchemist* undertakes a journey in order to find hidden treasure. Paulo Coelho himself embarks on a journey to find the hidden sword in order to get the title of "RAM" in his autobiographical novel *The Pilgrimage*. Pilar in *By the River Piedra I Sat Down & Wept* and Maria in *Eleven Minutes* embark on a journey in search of true love. In the same way, the narrator of *The Zahir* has to go in search of his missing wife, Esther. Elijah, the protagonist of *The Fifth Mountain* has to displace to save himself.

The Fifth Mountain (1996) is based on the story of an Israelite prophet Elijah in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kings, Chapter 17-19). Coelho makes a simple Biblical story an interesting one by giving it his own insights. The novel paints the experiences of Elijah in a foreign land called Zarephath to which its inhabitants called Akbar. The novel is divided into two parts. Part one narrates the displacement of Elijah from Israel to Zarephath (Akbar) and his struggle to survive there. Part two narrates the attack of Assyrians on Akbar and Elijah's efforts to rebuild the city. *The Fifth Mountain* deals with the universal theme of Survival. Elijah's displacement from Israel to Zarephath is the manifestation of his strong will to save himself, his religion and his people. Coelho exhibits the struggle of Elijah in such a way that he becomes the epitome of human strength. Like other novels of Coelho, *The Fifth Mountain* is a personal legend in which the protagonist overcomes all the misfortunes and achieves his goals.

Elijah's journey from Israel to Akbar and his battle to save his religion is the symbolic one. Twenty-three-year-old Elijah is living an ordinary life as a carpenter in Israel until he receives the message of the Angel of Lord. Suddenly, he is pulled out from his ordinary life. He realizes that he is a prophet and he is supposed to convey the Lord's message to rulers. He conveys the message of the Lord to King Ahab that there will be no rain until they stop the worship of the Phoenician gods. The queen, Jezebel orders to execute all the prophets of Israel as she is from Zarephath and forces the people to worship her God Baal in place of God Yahweh. Elijah escapes from Israel to Zarephath to save himself.

Though his journey is challenging one, he enjoys and learns the truth of life. He learns from a crow on the bank of the river Corinth; "When a man journeys toward his destiny, often he is obliged to change paths. At other times, the forces around him are too powerful and he is compelled to lay aside his courage and yield...But no one can lose sight of what he desires. Even if there are moments when he believes the world and the others are stronger. The secret is this: do not surrender." (Coelho 28).

When an individual displaces from the home country to host country he or she has to face problems such as alienation, identity crisis and discrimination whether he or she displaces willingly or forcefully. An individual has to suffer physically, psychologically, culturally and economically. Like any displaced individual, Elijah has to face problems in Zarephath. Initially, he struggles to find food and shelter in Zarephath. He is being constantly treated as a foreigner. Elijah is not a criminal, a prisoner, and a fugitive but someone who has dared to raise voice against God Baal.

The feeling of being uprooted from Israel continuously haunts Elijah. Though he faces exile, sufferings, and pain, he is determined to accomplish the task which has been assigned to him by the Angel of Lord. He says; "A displaced individual faces the conflicts

between his or her own culture and foreign culture. Elijah faces the same problem but in terms of religion. He is in Zarephath where people worship the God of Fifth Mountain. Elijah who is a prophet has great faith in his Lord.

Elijah also becomes the victim of discrimination in Zarephath. He is being treated as an enemy by the people of Zarephath. The High Priest of Zarephath says; "When we need something from Jezebel, we will pay for it with your head- the most important currency we have" (39). He has to prove himself at each and every step. When the son of the widow who gives him shelter falls ill, the people of Zarephath think that the foreigner has brought the anger of the gods of the Fifth Mountain.

"We are sheltering someone who is cursed by the gods" (48).

Elijah tries hard to cure the boy by praying his Lord but he dies. People of Zarephath condemn him for the death of widow's boy. He is asked to climb the Fifth Mountain, the residence of Phoenician gods to ask forgiveness. The circumstances force him to question his Lord. Though he knows that he is on the mission and he is guided by Lord, he feels that his Lord has abandoned him. As pointed out by Weiviorka in his article, *"Racism and Diasporas"*, "Under such circumstances the national majority considers migrants to be the root of its difficulties and draws on racial definitions that combine the idea of natural race and the idea of culture in order to make them scapegoats" (71).

The trials of climbing Fifth Mountain forces him to ask his Lord that why he was asked to go to Zarephath and to accomplish the mission? Why was he chosen for this mission? He cries out and asks why this misfortune happens to him? The dejected Elijah thinks that even if he escapes from there, he is not able to find a place for himself in the world. He holds a view that wherever he goes, he will bring misfortunes to others. He decides to surrender himself before the people of Zarephath. But the Angel of the Lord helps him and he gets success in bringing back that boy to life. He tries to establish his Lord's Grandeur but they do not accept His Lord. He once again fails to convince them about the miracle of his Lord.

Elijah's journey and his stay at Zarephath are full of challenges. During the attack of Assyrians, Elijah has to fight to save himself. Elijah wants to flee to Israel with the widow and her son but the Angel of the Lord stops him to do this as it is not the right time to go back. But as he believes himself as a misfortune, he is mistaken as a governor of the city and beaten severely by the Assyrian army. The Angel of the Lord blesses him with a miracle but he has to decide where the miracle supposed to be happening whether in Israel or in Akbar. He is in a dilemma and unable to take any decision. Because he wants to free his people from the tyranny of Queen Jezebel and in the same way he wants to rebuild the city of Akbar (Zarephath). During the attack, he loses that widow whom he

loves a lot. The widow is someone who has awakened love in his heart. As a result, he denies meeting his guardian angel until the day of his trials end. He is attacked by a group of man and blamed for Akbar's misfortune. He is again humiliated. When he recovers from the same, he is completely changed man. He does not have any desire to live as he has already lost his love. He is left with the destructed city of Akbar. But the widow's son is the only hope for whom he wants to live. The boy's words inspire him; 'all life's battles teach us something, even though we lose' (173)

It is very common that when protagonists of Coelho are about to give up during their journey, there is always someone with them to guide. Like the Old King of Solomon in *The Alchemist*, Petrus in *The Pilgrimage*, Elijah is being motivated by the shepherd's inspiring words. The shepherd's words act as a miracle for him. The shepherd does not feed only his body but his soul too. He says, "It is not difficult to rebuild a life, just as it is not impossible to raise Akbar from its ruins" (180). The destruction of Zarephath is proved to be a life-changing for Elijah. He is no longer a prophet. He is not guided by anyone and free to decide his own path. He decides to rebuild the city of Zarephath. He decides to go against his Lord but he forgets that to learn to rebuild before he goes to Israel is also a part of his journey. He wants to take revenge with Lord by rebuilding the city but he is actually following the path of which has been decided by Lord for him.

The decision of him to go against Lord makes him realize about his own capabilities. His journey proves to be a milestone for him as he learns to take his own decisions. It is a kind of rebirth of Elijah. In his rebel against God, he liberates himself. His spirituality is enhanced. He becomes strong mentally as well as physically. The other common quality of Coelho's protagonists is during they achieve something which change their lives at the end of their journey. Like Santiago in *The Alchemist*, Coelho himself in *The Pilgrimage*, Elijah too finds himself as a different person. He rebuilds the city which is more beautiful than before. He is forgiven by his Lord and the Angel of Lord again visits him to order to complete his mission of liberating people of Israel from the tyranny of Queen Jezebel.

Elijah has to leave. He leaves Akbar in the care of the widow' son. His last conversation with that boy shows the change in Elijah. It shows what he has learned and what he has achieved. He says; "God is all powerful. He can do anything and nothing is forbidden to Him (239). The wisdom which he has got during his struggle can be seen in the following words;

Still, because of His infinite power, He chose to do only Good. If we reach the end of our story, we shall see that often Good is disguised as Evil, but it goes on being the Good, and is part of the plan that He created for humanity. (240)

Conclusion

Through the story of Elijah, Coelho has tried to depict the struggle of an individual in a foreign land. He wants to show that we should overcome all difficulties to realize our 'personal legend'. Elijah's efforts to survive to show his determination towards his goal to liberate people of Israel. Like other novels, *The Fifth Mountain* also teaches a lesson to the readers not to give up even amidst of the storm. Elijah's journey is an inspiration saga which inspires the readers to embark on a journey to achieve their goals.

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