



## A GRAPH FROM OPTIMISM TO PESSIMISM IN PAULO COELHO'S VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE

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### ABSTRACT

Literature is life. It is inevitable to take away literature from man until the last human life on the earth. Death committed by one is not an easy choice to make, for the person may have undergone many circumstances in their life which make him/her to commit suicide. But in the case of Veronika, though she has everything in her life she decides to end her life. She comes up with every possible way to end her life without creating much struggle. She thinks that there is no reason to live when she possessed everything she wanted. She considers her life meaningless which is one of the main reasons for her to commit suicide. This is one of the issues in existential depression where an individual feel that they are no more an important part in the society. The person will stay away from the society at the initial level but as the scenario get worse the individual cannot think of anything but ending up the life. Existential Depression is a kind of depression associated with existential psychology which arises when an individual feels restless, hopeless, sad, anxiety, ashamed and worthless. "Existential Depression in Veronika Decides to Die" portrays how the four issues (as given by Yalom) play an important role in Veronika's life and how it makes her to understand what life is.

**Key Words:** *Literature, meaningless, suicide, Existential Depression.*

Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian novelist and lyricist. Paulo Coelho has written nearly twenty novels and two inspirational books. He has written his novels in Portuguese language. *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998) is translated from Portuguese to English by Margaret Jull Costa. The original title of the novel is *Veronika Decides Morrer*. This is the story of Veronika, a twenty- four years old pretty girl who works in a library in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She has everything in her life-good parents, job to support herself, talent, beauty and a boyfriend. Though she has everything in her life, she has a feeling of powerlessness which makes her to overdose herself with four packets of sleeping pills which she has been concealing it for a week. Even though she succeeded in committing suicide she could not die as she wished. After this incident, she thought of waking up in the heaven but she wakes up in the

purgatory of Villette, the country's famous lunatic asylum. She is told that her suicide has made her heart weak and is given a week's time for her survival. There in the asylum, she meets Mari, a white-haired lady who suffers from panic attack and Eduard, an ambassador's son who has been diagnosed as 'schizophrenic'. They make her to understand the importance of decision making which can change the whole life. Also, the death sentence given by Dr. Igor, the chief doctor of Villette makes Veronika to reacquire the will to live and love.

Death committed by oneself is not an easy choice to make, for the person may have undergone many circumstance in their life which make him/her to commit suicide. But in the case of Veronika, though she has everything in her life she decides to end her life. She comes up with every possible way to end her life without creating much struggle. She thinks that there is no reason to live when she possessed everything she wanted. She considers her life meaningless which is one of the main reason for her to commit suicide. This is one of the issues in existential depression where an individual feel that they are no more an important part in the society. The person will stay away from the society at the initial level but as the scenario get worse the individual cannot think of anything but ending up the life.

The term "Existentialism" was first used in the early 1940s to mark the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Paul Sartre and other Parisian writers. Soon, Sartre and Beauvoir used this term in their philosophies. When the topic of depression is being discussed, there may be different types of depression. This is all based on what situation causes the depression. Existentialism may also be one of the possible natures for depression. It will make the person to question about his or her life, death or meaning of life. By doing so, this will push them into depression. People who experience normal depression sometimes experience existential issues in the course of psychotherapy when questioned about the meaning of life. This is normal and in such cases many psychologists try to help their patients to explore the meaning of life.

According to Existentialism, humans through their own choices, desires and pursuits decides their own life. They are wholly responsible for their own happiness or misery. Existential Depression may occur when the people face issues pertaining to life, death, freedom and meaning of life. It is usually categorized by a unique sense of hopelessness in which the person thinks that life is meaningless.

Existential Depression is most likely found in gifted and talented individuals, for they have to stay away from the talent they acquired because of the circumstance they face sometimes. This will slowly *isolate* them, they become *alienated*, finds life to be *meaningless*, which eventually lead them to choose *death*. Death is inevitable. No one can escape from death. Every person born in this world knows that death will leave no one. When a person thinks of death, an unknown fear automatically fills the mind of the person. If it is to be examined from the existential point of view, it is an inner

conflict between life and death. That is, it is the conflict between the knowledge of inevitable death and the desire to live at the same time.

Isolation is being away from others. There are two types of isolation namely, interpersonal isolation and intrapersonal isolation. Interpersonal isolation is between people it is an isolation which separates oneself from others. It is all about the question of intimacy, the relation that one has with the other. Intrapersonal isolation is an isolation which one makes to oneself. It is a term which was first introduced by Freud. It refers that one is isolated from the part of self (desire, affection). The self is dislocated from one's awareness. Existential isolation is different from these two types of isolation. No matter one tries to be close with the other, there will be always an unbridged gap which cannot be filled. Each individual in their consciousness created by self, will start to compare the self with the others and starts differentiating to see how far they are better than others.

As the novel moves on, the reason for committing suicide is slowly revealed. It reveals that Veronika suffers from existential depression on considering the four concerns-death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness given by Yalom in *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980). The first major concern death is associated with the psychological conflict between the awareness of inevitable death and the desire to live. On reading Paulo Coelho's article, she gets surprised by the first line of the text which asks about the location of Slovenia. Soon she shows disinterest but has to come back to the article because she did not know what to do for a little time. She decides to write a suicidal letter, a letter to the magazine about the history of Slovenia for she is not ready to write the real reason for her death. She laughs about how the newspapers would react to her suicide and how her suicide becomes a topic for debate.

Though Veronika goes through many difficulties in her life because of the existential depression, she was able to find her ray of hope in the end. This existential depression has made Veronika to stay away from others almost from her childhood. Though it is a difficult decision to make, she goes for it to stay protected from being criticised or being watched. Only after coming to the asylum, she gets to know about life and open up her heart to Mari, Zedka and Eduard. She starts to come out of the wall she created and spoke to her heart content to Eduard who listened to all her stories quietly. The things which have been in her heart for a long time comes out. This lightens up her heart which makes her think that she can die any moment happily because of her finding the ray of hope.

The depression in Veronika has made her to create a protective wall around her. She thinks that this wall will protect her from the outside world. But because of this wall she becomes lonely and starts to feel that life is meaningless and wishes to die. This later on makes her to become a patient in the

asylum. This existential depression changes the way of her life to death and she learns to live through the lesson of death. Because of which she starts to come out of her wall and open up to people.

Though this novel *Veronika Decides to Die* highlights death which is pessimistic in nature from the graph of optimism to pessimism, it teaches an important lesson to its readers. Through the life of Veronika, Coelho not only makes the readers to understand the importance of life but also to know how life is precious and cannot be recovered once it is lost. Pessimism is needed in the novel because this pessimism makes Veronika courageous to break the wall she created for herself.

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