



## A Woman's Search for Identity in *Adultery* by Paulo Coelho



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**Abstract:**

***'Sometimes you have to lose yourself to discover who you are'***

The above statement reveals the dilemma of a woman who feels that in order to search her identity; she'll have to lose herself. And this lays a foundation for the novel *Adultery* which is written by Paulo Coelho, a well-known author worldwide. The story deals with the complex and tangible life of a woman in her thirties, who seems to have a perfect life in the eyes of everyone yet there's something that makes her dissatisfied with her marriage, a loving husband, sweet children, an adorable career and enormous wealth. The aim of my research paper is to find out the psychological aspect concerning the changing perception of a woman about her marriage and family and how at present this unconventional woman is ready to cross the thresholds to rekindle love and passion that is missing in her married life with the special reference of Linda, the female protagonist of the novel.

**Objective:**

- 1) To study male perspective about a woman's dream and dilemma
- 2) To scrutinize a modern woman's struggle for her identity
- 3) To study the changing form of marriage
- 4) To examine the relevance between the society described by Paulo and the real society



## Introduction

**“Ah, but I haven’t introduced myself. Pleased to meet you, my name’s Linda. I’m thirty-one, five foot eight, 150 pounds and I wear the best clothes that money can buy (thanks to my husband’s limitless generosity). I arouse desire in men and envy in other women.”** Line 1-3 Pg 1 This opening statement gives the readers an idea that the narrator is at the top of the world since she has a wonderful and magnetic life. I reckon that Linda is in dilemma as in the next lines, she admits that she has an opulent “wonderful husband” who is in love with her, two children “reason for living”. She goes on holiday to ‘far-flung paradise’ with her entire family once a year. She feels proud and gratified sometimes to see herself in a better condition than the most of people around. She is a ‘highly regarded journalist’ at a ‘respectable newspaper’ which gives her sense of being self-dependent woman but still she keeps grappling with some things that falsify all her achievements, contentment and wealth. She confesses “... **every morning, when I open my eyes to this ideal world that everyone dreams of having but few achieve, I know the day will be a disaster.**” She presents entirely different picture of today’s woman who unlike the woman of past was contented with a career, family and wealth as she despite all her commodities is unsatisfied and is seeking for something that she even herself is not aware with. Once she bumps into Jacob her teen age childhood friend who is now a married and budding politician. She falls in love with him and even gives lame excuses to meet him. Her love for Jacob refills her life with charm and content which she did not find earlier. **“Dear Depression, please keep your distance. Don’t be nasty. Find some other person with more reason than me to look in the mirror and say: “What a pointless existence.” Whether you like it or not, I know how to defeat you. You’re wasting your time.”** (19-23) pg. 31

Linda finds herself in a different world after her affair with Jacob, it seems the void in her life has vanished and she has stepped into a new world. She herself is surprised to see her new incarnation when she’s in Jacob’s company; even she asks from her, **“Who is this**



**woman I become whenever I'm with Jacob? Pg 62, line 5** She's extra careful while dealing with her husband and colleagues since she doesn't want them to get any clue of this new and adventurous change in her life. She tries to cover up her emotions and loves to feel her happiness in her heart.

The society Linda lives in is not very different from ours since she also has fears that her extreme steps might ruin her marriage and might bring disgrace to her and her family. **"Sin is followed by a fear of being caught." Line 1, pg. 29** When she comes across the news that Jacob was having affair with one of his colleague's wife and that he was encouraged by his colleague only to date with his wife to remove the boredom of his married life, Linda is surprised and she says, **"Jacob lives in a completely different world from mine, where wives don't feel jealous and husbands encourage their wives to have affairs."**  
**Lines; 17-19, Pg52**

There're certain reasons why she wants to live her life at her own condition. She wants attention from her husband, she wants her likes and dislikes to be talked about but in most of the marriages, it generally doesn't happen. **"...I fall in love with him all over again. Not one, not even my marvelous husband, has ever asked if I'm happy." Pg 37, Line 18-19** She's got bored of her daily routine in such a way that she offers her husband to exchange their duties. Once while talking to Jacob, she reveals how meaningless and incapable their lives are! **"We like fish in aquariums; they remind us of ourselves, well fed but incapable of moving beyond the glass wall." Pg 115, lines: 21-22.** This statement by Linda showcases the bitter reality of life. Linda here refers to her own life which is lavish, grand and full of comfort yet it is also full of boredom, monotony and melancholy. She wants to come out of her routine devoid of any charisma and passion. She wants to overcome her insecurity of dying one day after living a thrilling a worthy life. Adultery is defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as **"voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner**



***other than the lawful husband or wife.***" This novel grabs my attention because it's always good to perceive male point of view about certain issues concerning women. Paulo very successfully portrays the character of Linda who dares the societal norms that are meant for men and prioritizes herself above anyone else because it's said that we first try to make ourselves happy then only we'll be able to spread happiness all around. We generally think that male novelists are not capable enough to do justice with their female characters in terms of expressing their feelings and emotions but Paulo doesn't disappoint us. During one of his interviews, Paulo answers to the question related to handling feminism, **"...And even when my protagonist is masculine, I'm writing from using this feminine energy. It depends how deep you dig into your soul. They can handle peace and prosperity. The problem is that they are always insecure, if they can keep this forever. So the question is not that they cannot handle it, it is how to keep this forever. And, as you know, it is impossible, so people start to destroy the excitement of the present moment due to the fact that they are trying to live behind walls to protect their prosperity and happiness."** (1)

**"What I see is that there are many people who destroy their marriages because of one-night stands with someone else. And as the French say, "C'est ne pas grave." It's not something easy to swallow, but at the same time, it does not justify you to end a long-lasting relationship because something happened."** (2) Though Paulo's discernment about infidelity and marriage is entirely different that won't be considered noble in our society. It's a very weird idea to be involved into extra marital affair to escape from indifference and melancholy of marriage. Since such relations not only ruin the lives of the people involved but also the relations and families as well. Hence we can say that post marital affairs lead us to nowhere for they don't have any future. Especially if a woman makes advances to such relation, she's regarded as mean or unprincipled. Moreover she is fully aware with the prejudice and biased treatment of society between males and females. She understands it well that a married woman is never forgiven for having a relation with another man. If a man gets involved in such relation, it's considered his genetic



quality; it's woman who has to bear the brunt because she is regarded as unscrupulous and sinner. **“Men cheat because it’s in their genetic code. A woman does it because she doesn’t have enough dignity; in addition to handing over her body, she always ends up handing over a bit of heart. A true crime.” Pg 187** She also talks about how a woman feels inmate with a man whom she hands over her body and this makes a major difference between a man and a woman. We find that society has decided some yardstick in terms of woman’s behavior and life. She is expected not to speak out her feelings about her sexual desire. Since it’s a social taboo and a prohibited topic for her, however expressing such feelings is the sign of masculinity.

But this is true that in our busy life, we take our emotions for granted as we even don’t have time to ponder about us, though we should be the most significant people for us but we try to keep striving to please everyone around us which is really a herculean task. If we study emotional difference between a man and a woman, we find a drastic difference between them. Society tells men to keep their emotions up to them since expressing one’s emotions is considered womanish. Linda, the protagonist of Adultery is suffering from emotional null and void in her married life which has made her depressed and tired of her roles as a mother, a wife and a working woman. Linda is very bold who finds no point living a monotonous life and goes ahead to find the vitality of her life back. **Psychologists have offered three types of explanations for these declines: normal rebound, emotional erosion, and motivational erosion. These are not mutually exclusive explanations. Combinations of all three factors could contribute to declines in marital satisfaction.**

**(3)**

Marriage is considered the greatest institution in our society whether it is the east or the west, it believes in fidelity, honesty, sincerity and firm faith in this institution and if any of the spouses goes beyond the frame work, it’s certain that this institution will crumble. Paulo through one of his characters comments on this misconception, **“If married people, for whatever reason, decide to look for another partner, this does not necessarily mean**



that the couple is not doing well. Nor do I believe that sex is the primary motive. It has more to do with boredom, with the lack of passion for life, with shortage of challenges. It's a combination of factors.

Because, ever since we have moved away from God, we live a fragmented existence. We try to find oneness, but do not know the way back; thus, we are in a state of constant dissatisfaction where society prohibits and creates laws, but this does not solve problems.”

Linda has immense love for her husband and children and she also knows how her entire reputation, marriage and career is at stake but she is determined to go ahead with her relation with Jacob and she follows her heart, **“I love my husband....I'm vulnerable, but I don't regret that. Pg 124 22-25** She thinks to discuss her 'strange state of mind with her husband but she doesn't want to ruin her new found bliss of Jacob's company. She's in complete dilemma as she says **'Why spoil it by confessing to things I don't even understand myself?' pg 59, lines: 8-9**

**“Cuban and Linda further talk about why men cheat more than women, even when they know that this behaviour is self-destructive. They come to the conclusion that men and women have the same desire to cheat on their partners but women have more self-control.**

The research and discussions about adultery make sense to Linda and her relationship with Jacob helps her overcome her depression and displeasure with life. The adultery, in some ways, strengthens her relationship with her husband and things begin to get back to normal.” (4)

**“In a healthy relationship, this is even more important for a couple's stability than making plans for the future or talking about the children. Pg 135, lines: 7-9** After going through the entire novel, I can say that if Linda is open to a post marital relation it's not that she doesn't love her husband, children or her family **'I love being with my family, feeling that I'm both protector and protected.’ Pg 73, line 5-6** But she feels that she doesn't have the quality time with her husband since the married life is more than talking about the



future or the plans for children. As a spouse she feels that intense relationship and personal space between her and her husband has flown away. She feels lonely because her inner self is not contented with the sort of life; she is living after 10 years of her marriage. **“...I really do have a problem: a heart in love.” Line 27-28, pg. 31.** She wants her to be admired and taken care of by her partner so that her emotional needs can be fulfilled. **In his blog by Noor Ahmed Baloch, a Pakistani blogger, “... it is important to face your inner feelings. If you want to live a successful and meaningful life, you need to give your emotions some consideration. Also, a true relationship, whether during, after or before marriage, is beyond the horizons of just physicality or sexuality. The psychological aspects of relationships are ignored by many and this is what causes bonds to break.”**

Marriage in Indian society is considered as a bond between the spouses not one but for the seven births and fidelity plays a pivotal role in it so no one even can't think of renewing his vows after losing himself in such relation. This is a sure shot guarantee of ruining a marriage and separation of a family. **“No one saw us....Our marriages are safe.” Pg 57, lines 11-12** Even in the western society also people make efforts to save their marriages for the sake of their children and family. But marriage changes a lot over the time along with partners so it's so significant to weed out the monotony and void that has seeped in between them. **"For our part, to stay together for the longest possible time is a poor goal for marriage. Other ends—growth, fulfillment, happiness, among others—are more important and may demand shorter relationships if they are given priority. People change and the marriage that was valid at one time may lose its validity." (Constantine & Constantine, 1973, page 203)**

Even couples that know perfectly well how to respond to each other effectively may lose their capacity for effective adaptive processes when under stress. In light of these broader forces affecting relationships, policies that address individual well-being and current sources of stress on family life may be as effective at promoting healthy relationships as any interventions that target relationships directly.





Research on the effects of public policies on marital outcomes supports this idea.

(5)

**“I tell myself: you’re a fool, he just wants to get you into bed. He doesn’t care about your happiness.”** Line 1-2 pg 38 Linda tries very hard to avoid the thoughts of Jacob but she is not able to so. Even she convinces herself that Jacob is deliberately stirring her heart because he wants her to have physical relationship with him. The very thought of Jacob makes her feel sick and helpless sometimes. However Linda wishes to have attention and is not clinically depressed still she keeps thinking about her irrational behavior which is sometimes beyond her understanding. She is suffering from some sense of insecurity that I reckon is very common in all the human beings such as what would happen if she died or if her husband would remarry after her death or had her husband involved with someone romantically because they didn’t share the intense relationship as they used to have before. One more reason according to me is when someone has a perfect life; somewhere in the corner of his heart he is scared because nothing in this world is everlasting. **This world is based upon the principle “This shall too pass”** So Linda’s intuition or perception is very logical. She just keeps assuring herself that she is not sick and she wishes to have extra attention from someone that can make her feel better in her life. She is unable to take sound sleep and is always confound **“Am I trying to create a real problem to drive away my imaginary ones? Am I really in love or have I simply transformed all the last month’s unpleasant feelings into a fantasy?”** Pg 124-125 In process of satisfying herself, she comes to one conclusion that may be she is unable to bridge between her personal life and professional life because she says, **“it’s not easy to balance the two.”** Pg 82, last line she professes love on the top of everything because at the end of the day, the satisfaction that one acquires is out of love, it is not because of success, wealth or family only as without love no deed has any magnitude. She talks to herself and condemns a life like hers which according to her is worthless. **“Even if I were the most successful woman...I had no love in my heart. Nothing”** *“I ask all those hope to one day work for the good of humanity: never forget that even if you deliver up your body*





***to be burned, you gain nothing if you have not love. Nothing!*** Pg 122-123 12-14 lines

Linda feels miserable because now nothing goes according to her plan and she trudged through the memory lane and she recalls how during her childhood, her plans never failed and that made her to be on the top of the world. She compares her life with a computer which is virus infected and which is getting 'sluggish' and useless. **"...we can switch to a new machine, but about the things stored there, the things that took so many years to put in order?"** Pg 140, lines 8-10 she is going through the grey phase in her life when she feels rejected by Jacob a man whom she is in deep love and she also finds herself aloof in her own family because her husband is entirely engrossed in his own life. She vents out her annoyance at her husband's strange behavior, **"Who seems close, but who never shows his weakness and vulnerabilities."** Pg: 140, lines: 14-15 She even hatches a plan to trap Jacob's wife to satisfy the ghost inside her. According to her everybody has a ghost inside which is developed because of our unfulfilled dreams and desires.

**"Ever since I got married, I don't have any time for myself."** Pg 141 This statement emphasizes on how complex and miserable life a married woman leads to; she, who has her family to look after and a promising career to value her salt but the plight of her life is she has to juggle with the several duties and she hardly has time for herself when she can brood over what she expects from her life and from herself **"I just wanted to get out of a rut, finding a better reason for my boring, unchallenging life."** Pg 144, lines; 26-27 she even thinks about the women who are suffering due to their husbands' ill treatment though their husbands love them immensely. **"I have seen men madly in love with their wives lose their heads and beat them, only to beg and sob for forgiveness immediately after that."** Pg 145, lines; 21-23

**Conclusion:**

**"We aren't who we want to be. We are what society demands. We are what our parents choose. We don't want to disappoint anyone; we have a great need to be loved. So we smother the best in us. Gradually, the light of our dreams turns into the**



**monster of our nightmares. They become things not done, possibilities not lived.”**

**pg 149, 8-13** Linda makes the above statement while conversing with her husband.

Through this sentence, she makes a satire on how the rein of our life is never in our own hands. Since childhood, a person has to follow the wishes of some or the other person and it's very unfortunate but realistic that nobody is desired to know about our needs, dreams or plans that we have for us. **This continuous demand by people and our surroundings place great hindrances in our lives and psychologists' researches have proved that our personality improves because of our traits, attitudes towards our life and ethical values but if this balance but if there's an imbalance the entire life gets affected. (6)**

Several negative feelings like anger, jealousy, annoyance, revenge etc make the people mentally and physically sick. As far as Linda's character is concerned, I feel that her problems are due to her loneliness, lack of love and time for herself and burden of responsibilities. However I don't justify her involvement in post marital affair to vent out her displeasure against the complexities of her life. Linda's affair with Jacob to save her marriage is entirely unique and weird to some extent and no society whether it's the east or the west, would profess it since such behavior raises a question on the sanctity of an institution like marriage. But true love does not expose one's weakness to others, but it should make him strong to seek for an advice whenever he is in need. But Paulo's idea of self-satisfaction should be praised as life is an excellent gift of God and it should be respected and lived to its full and there's nothing wrong if our heart demands for some time for ourselves and it should be we who're to decide the limits in our lives not the society or anyone else. After all at the end of the day it is love that exists in this materialistic world. The novel ends at a remarkable note: **“But one thing will be forever marked on the soul of the universe: my love.”**

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