

ECO-SPIRITUAL ANALYSIS OF FEMININE DIVINITY IN COELHO'S BRIDA

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ABSTRACT

The present study is an exploration of the conception of feminine divinity and its manifestation in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*. The embodiment of feminine divinity is analyzed in light of eco-spirituality, specifically deep ecology framework proposed by Arne Næss (1973). It is a mixed-method research with quantitative data collection followed by qualitative evaluation. The analysis is assisted by the corpus tool AntConc 4.2.0. for locating keywords in context (KWIC) and concordance lines. It is conducted in two phases a) analysis of divine feminine as manifested through eco-animate beings, and b) analysis of materialization of eco-spiritual norms. It is concluded that the divine feminine is embodied in protagonist and manifested through her relationship to the nature. Secondly, the eco-spiritual norms are portrayed through self-realization of *Brida*, diversity of form, magic and spirituality, and through interdependence of different life forms. Thus, Coelho has actively portrayed feminine divinity as embodied by his protagonist in *Brida*.

Keywords: eco-spirituality, deep ecology, feminine divine, Paulo Coelho, *Brida*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminine divinity is the revered notion of inherent femininity of god. It may be traced back to goddesses such as Isis of ancient Egypt (Geissler, 2013, p. 1) and Demeter of Greek mythology who were widely worshipped for their maternal and reproductive attributes symbolizing the sacredness of the feminine (Keller, 1998, p. 1-3). These practices have, throughout the history of mankind, laid the foundation for the reverence of the divine feminine. People have found solace in the maternal comfort of deities either through practice, solely their beliefs or through writings such as that of Julian of Norwich. Julian, a Christian mystic and anchoress of the 14th and 15th centuries offered profound understanding of nature of god, perceiving it to be essentially feminine (Heimmel, 1980, p. 1-2). A similar tone may be observed in Paulo Coelho's literary work *Brida*.

Brida centers on the spiritual journey of the protagonist *Brida*. It explores feminine spirituality manifested through the characters *Brida* and

Wicca, paralleled with an androcentric theological supremacy portrayed through the characters of Lorens and Magus. The current study undertakes corpus-assisted analysis of the said book in lieu of eco-spirituality. Eco-spiritual lens provides a theoretical foundation for the intrinsic association of nature with human beings. It probes into the commingling of nature and evolution of human character, justifying reverence for nature and its celebration and the intermingling of man and nature, thereby proving to be an appropriate theoretical basis for the study at hand. Eco-spiritual analysis of the feminine divinity in *Brida* directs the study into an investigation of the linkage between the feminine divine and that of nature.

The exploration of the feminine divine is particularly peculiar to the works of Ibn Arabi. He speaks of woman in his *Futuh al Makkiyya* as such;

Whoever knows the worth of women and the secret contained within them will not refrain from loving

them. Indeed, love for them is part of the perfection of the knower of God. For such love is a legacy from the Prophet and a divine love. And the Prophet says: “They were made dear to me (perfume and women)”. (Milani, Taheri and Kars, 2022, p. 14)

The works of the historical female mystics, Julian of Norwich and A’ishah al-Ba’uniyyah i.e., *Revelations of Divine Love* and *The Principles of Sufism* respectively reveal the significance of the feminine divine beyond religious boundaries (Milani, Taheri and Kars, 2022, p. 14-16). Their conception of feminine divine will serve as a guiding principle throughout this study to aptly identify the instances where it is manifested in the book in light of eco-spirituality. In *Brida*, Coelho presents a vision where the feminine aspect of divinity is highly revered, showcasing the nurturing, intuitive, and transformative qualities associated with the goddess archetype.

By examining Coelho's portrayal of the divine feminine and its interaction with the natural world, the study will gain insights into the author's perspective on the interconnectedness of spirituality, gender, and ecological consciousness. Through this exploration, the researcher seeks to deepen the understanding of how this book contributes to the discourse on eco-spirituality and feminist divinity, shedding light on the transformative potential of embracing the sacred feminine within oneself and the surroundings.

1.1. Research Objectives

- i. To analyze Paulo Coelho's portrayal of feminine divinity in *Brida* by examining the description of the female protagonist and her connections to spiritual attributes.
- ii. To explore the eco-spiritual cues surrounding feminine divinity in Paulo Coelho's *Brida* by investigating the depiction of nature, ecological elements, and their symbolic representations in connection to female characters and their spiritual journeys.

1.2. Research Questions

- i. How does Paulo Coelho portray the concept of feminine divinity in his novel *Brida*?
- ii. How are the eco-spiritual cues surrounding feminine divinity manifested in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*?

1.3. Rationale

The novel selected for the present study is because of its focus on a female protagonist undergoing a spiritual and transformational journey in search of a soul mate. The novel targets the conventional androcentric spiritual norms and brings to light the role of the feminine in attaining a sustainable eco-spiritual disposition. It contrasts the male-hegemonized realm of the spiritual with strong female characters as that of Brida and Wicca. The novel is an ultimate portrayal of the confrontation of the masculine and feminine divine, questioning the traditional patriarchal theistic practices and beliefs.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Feminine Divine

Irigaray (1985, p. 18) speaks of the gender-bias in theistic discourse which centers primarily on men and views women as merely a “speculum” of the masculine hegemon. The women in this regard are otherized, excluded entirely from the religious episteme. She puts forward the idea of a more gender-inclusive theism, essentially highlighting the need for a gendered divinity (Irigaray, 1985, p. 297-298). Her works foreground the significance of the female attributes pertaining to the discursive practices of religion. She directs women, declaring it is imperative for them to embody the divine in their attributes and work towards attaining perfection which will further lay ground for the formulation of feminine subjectivity. This exemplifies Irigaray's (1985) notions of the feminine divine as being extrinsic to females, one that has to be actively embodied within oneself (Poxon, 2003). Therefore, she is widely regarded as one of the major contributors to the discourse of feminine divinity.

Anderson (2006) embarks on the pursuit of a philosophy that aptly addresses the weaknesses in Irigaray's (1985) belief of feminine divinity. According to Anderson (2006), Irigaray's (1985) ideas overlook the inherent divinity of women and rather persuade women to seek divinity themselves. This self-pursuance fails to account for a smooth transition from female subjectivity to the attainment of divinity. The researcher aims to cover this gap with a theory which elaborates on the notion of the divine by evaluating intersubjectivity and the Christian-origin belief of the divine embodying a flesh form i.e., incarnation rather than

the other way around. With this new theoretical proposition, Anderson (2006) substantiates an inherent divine nature of woman. This is a feminist take on Irigaray's (1985) position on the divine and reflects on the traditional androcentric theistic practices of mankind.

The intersubjectivity of the theistic argument is further investigated by Burns (2012) who draws attention to the gender-neutral approach of the Abrahamic religions and underscores the possibility that Jantzen and Aderson's philosophies may not be particularly feministic in nature. Thus, she proposes that a feminist theistic ideology is not fundamentally feministic, but rather inclusive. This is a new take on religious philosophy which is essential for the accurate interpretation of feminine divine in *Brida*. The gender-biased theorization of theism is the integral premise of the present study, focusing essentially on *Brida*'s character for evaluating the manifestation of feminine divine in contrast to male-dominated spirituality. Hence, Burns' (2012) idea of theistic inclusivity as the modern feminine theology will prove monumental to the present research.

In another instance, a study by Hashal & Murshed (2020) explores the importance of women in Coelho's life and its reflection in his works. The study actively engages in investigation of the feminine divine as portrayed in *The Witch of Portobello* (Coelho, 2007) and *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* (Coelho, 1996). It is unveiled that Coelho views women as embodiment of the divine and centers the said novels on the same conviction. He portrays the female goddess through the protagonists of the afore-mentioned novels. Thus, the present study aims to probe into Coelho's portrayal of the feminist element of divine in the novel *Brida*. It will do so by the lens of eco-spirituality.

2.2. Eco-Spirituality

Preston (2007) expounds on the term "eco-spirituality" denoting it arises from a multi-generational movement that is essentially interdisciplinary and can therefore not be restricted to a single domain. He defines spirituality as a non-traditional pursuit of a religion which may be executed in a myriad of ways. Eco-spirituality is then presumed to be a process whereby nature is incorporated into an individual's journey in search of the divine via a series of planned rituals. The

same phenomena may be observed in *Brida* and will be evaluated in the textual analysis.

On the subject of eco-spirituality, Pulé (2012) puts forward a proposition for men to be more ecologically conscious and aware of their actions. The researcher guides them to adapt more nurturing behavior, deriving the idea from a feminist theory of care. He further reiterates the importance of internal cleansing for men to arrive at what he calls the position of "ecomen". These men serve nature and broader ecological aspects to drive it toward sustainability and a deepening of the body-nature bond. This is seen as a spiritual journey which is imperative for men to undertake in order to transform their ecological selves and others. Thus, Pulé's (2012) study substantiates the necessity of a spiritual journey for ecological transformation and sustainability. The present research aims to dissect the spiritual journey of *Brida*'s protagonist in terms of the eco-spiritual elements employed by the author.

Hultman and Pulé (2020) conducted research to determine the impact of masculinities on ecology. They classify masculinities into two distinct categories – "industrial" and "ecomodern". The former is the materialization of the traditional role of male as breadwinner and the latter are the ones hegemonizing world politics. The researchers postulate these masculinities as being harmful to ecology and solicit men to ecologise their masculinities, thereby constructing more nurturing masculinities. This study thus contributes to the present endeavor the notion of eco-harmful masculinities which are manifested through traditional and modern male dominated roles. This will further be explored, in parallel to the feminine divinity, as manifested in the characters of Lorens and Magus.

On the nexus between ecology and the body, Laidlaw (2021) explores the realm of dance and its implications on the said relationship. Laidlaw (2021) views body as being one with the Earth and as the point of inception of self as distinct from ecology at large. By evaluating dance rituals, the researcher investigates the co-creation of reality i.e., by the body and the ecology. This reality drives the ecology towards sustainability. It is further denoted that the body and beyond-body-beings co-become what is one with ecology through dance. Laidlaw's (2021) work is substantial for the present endeavor because it will aid in a) uncovering the

nature of relationship between the body and ecology and b) determining the role of dance rituals in ecologising individuals.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The present study follows a mixed methods research design denoting that the researcher will collect data quantitatively and evaluate it by qualitative means. The quantitative collection of the data will be done through the corpus tool AntConc 4.2.0. This software will be used for locating the total keyword in context (KWIC) hits for eco-spiritual attributes which are mandatory for tracking manifestations of the feminine divine. The attributes being searched in this study will primarily be ecologically animate beings located within their context to affirm their linkage to the protagonist. The software will further provide tools for locating the concordances of the identified words in order to determine the incorporation of eco-spiritual aspects in the novel.

3.2. Data Collection Sources

The data collection sources which were utilized in the present study are mainly secondary. They serve as the main foundation of the literature review and provide further insight into the same propositions. The primary sources in this regard are not utilized as the main focus of the study was on textual data such as research articles, books and essays.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

The present research endeavors to locate the materializations of the feministic divinity in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*. It will do so in lieu of eco-spirituality, and deep ecology being the main theoretical framework. The deep ecology framework put forth by Arne Næss (1973) identifies eight norms of eco-spirituality which may be observed. These are self-realization, biocentric equality, spontaneity and uniqueness, diversity, interdependence, egalitarianism, decentralization and biospherical egalitarianism. From among these, the study will focus on the exploration of self-realization, diversity and interdependence.

Self-realization according to Næss is the experience through which one becomes aware of the extent of his potential. This journey is specific to each individual and depends on the choices he

makes. Additionally, diversity according to Næss is the belief of existence of a variety of animate beings and life forms within the ecological sphere. Finally, interdependence is the idea that all of these life forms are interwoven and dependent on each other for sustainability. The study at hand aims to locate the instances where these norms presented by Næss are portrayed in the novel.

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study is conducted in two sections. The first section is concerned with locating feminine divinity and its realization, determined through the identification of the eco-animate beings with the help of the corpus tool AntConc 4.2.0., whereby instances of eco-spirituality are linked with the protagonist through association with eco-animate beings. The second section focuses on analyzing manifestations of the eco-spiritual norms as specified in Næss' framework of deep ecology.

4.1. Divine Feminine as Manifested through Eco-Animate Beings

The text of the novel *Brida* was converted into .txt format and prepped for the corpus analysis. The prepared corpus was processed in the said tool in order to easily detect the manifestation of eco-animate linkage to *Brida*. The identification of the diverse life forms was done manually. Each of the instances specified for the manifestation of the feminine divine through eco-linkage to other life forms was searched on AntConc and the total number of hits was noted. It was as follows;

Table 1

Total Hits of KWIC of Eco-Animate Beings in the Corpus

Eco-Animate Being*	Total Hits
Sun	82
Moon	87
Star	24
Tree	29
Forest	58
mountain	25
Sky	30
Wind	9
Cloud	23
Rock	16
River	9

Flower	14
Sunrise	2
Sunset	9
Leaf	7

Note. These words and their total KWIC hits were located using the AntConc KWIC tool, and the asterisk with the nouns denotes that their lemmas were searched.

The total hits for KWIC of the identified eco-life forms were 424. However, this number solely does not specify the context in which these terms were used. Therefore, the researcher manually analyzed each KWIC with the token size of 10 in order to determine whether these nouns were used in relation to the protagonist. Upon doing so, it was discovered that out of the total 82 hits for the lemma sun, 41 were used in context of the protagonist. These contexts displayed an innate bond between Brida and the sun. She used the sun as a tool to source her inner capabilities. She was shown praying to the sun and underwent a spiritual cleanse in order to strengthen her tie to sun. These could be observed in the concordance lines;

there was always some trace of tradition of the sun sometimes it was a sculpture
 Brida was watching a sunrise a sun that would from then on light the rest of her teach me the tradition of the sun then said Brida she knew what the tradition of the sun was she found herself hoping that the sun would linger a little longer in the sky The other nouns were analyzed manually in a similar way to identify which of the contexts in which they were used was with respect to the protagonist Brida. This new data is provided in Table 2.

Table 2
 Frequency of Eco-Animate Beings in the Corpus Used in Context with Brida

Eco-Animate Being*	Total Hits
Sun	41
Moon	49
Star	11
Tree	9
Forest	31
mountain	10
Sky	12
Wind	4
Cloud	11
Rock	8

River	5
Flower	11
Sunrise	1
Sunset	8
Leaf	3

Note. The KWIC of the above mentioned words were located with AntConc and then manually analyzed to locate the context relevant to Brida.

As is evident in Table 2, the instances of the ecologically animate objects were not all purely occurrences of Brida’s linkage to the life forms. Out of the 87 KWIC hits for moon, only 49 were linked with Brida. 11 out of 24 KWIC hits of star were in relation to the protagonist. Similarly, for trees it was 9, 31 for forest, 10 for mountain, 12 for sky, 4 for wind, 11 for cloud, 8 for rock, 5 for river, 11 for flowers and only 1 for sunrise was associated with the character of Brida. Lastly, the relevant hits for Brida’s tie with sunset were 8 and they were only 3 for leaf.

Furthermore, it was imperative to conduct a deeper analysis of the identified key words in context in order to accurately determine the status of the feminine divine in the selected work by Coelho. However, the data presented in Table 1 and Table 2 substantiates the relationship of Brida with other life forms in the novel. As may be observed in the line, “She raised her arms to the moon and invoked the magical forces of nature.” (Coelho, 2008, p. 156) This line denotes that the girl called upon another life form within her ecological placement in order to invoke it so that she may be granted access to its powers.

Similarly, in another instance Coelho (2008) says, “she said to the now silent forest” (p. 17) and “she shouted to the forest” (p. 18) These lines portray that she was aware of the life surrounding her and acknowledged their existence, personifying them as one would address a human. This blurs the distinction between human and alternate life forms, and shows the formation of a link between the feminine and eco-animate beings such as moon and the forest. All the other KWIC hits for the selected nouns as in association with Brida, which were a total of 214 were moments where she was depicted as being connected to these life forms. This is a conventional and most fundamental manifestation of the feminine divine through eco-animate beings. Thus, Paulo in this novel has efficiently made use of this feature to characterize Brida as a feminine divine.

4.2. Materialization of the Eco-Spiritual Norms

The eco-spiritual norms in the deep ecology framework as specified by Næss which were explored in the present study were self-realization, diversity and interdependence. These were investigated manually and the occasions where they were materialized were highlighted. They were evaluated as presented below;

4.2.1. Self-realization

The entire plot of the novel revolves around the spiritual journey of the protagonist Brida. In search for a soul mate, she undergoes the learning of two traditions, namely Tradition of the Sun and Tradition of the Moon. Throughout her journey, Brida learns to move past her apprehensions and internalizes the two traditions in such a way which enhance her spiritual status from that of a novice to a witch. During her learning of the tradition of the moon, she was faced with many challenges. She was left in solitude in the forest at nighttime. That is where she learned to invoke the spirits and call upon moon, finally embracing her innate strength. As may be seen in the line, “I perform this ritual now to show that I belong to that world” (Coelho, 2008, p. 156) She ends her night with attaining the spirituality of the master of the tradition of the moon. Hence, this illustrates self-realization and actualization of her character.

4.2.2. Diversity

The diversity in the selected novel is showcased through various ways. Firstly, there is a magical diversity which is seen in the different traditions of magic i.e., the sun and the moon. This is provided in the lines, “The Tradition of the Sun, which teaches the secrets through space and the world that surrounds us, and the Tradition of the Moon, which teaches through time and the things that are imprisoned in time’s memory.” (Coelho, 2008, p. 10). Secondly, there is diversity of life form. Various aspects of nature such as the forest, moon and stars are personified and presented as animate beings. It is one of the primal features of feminine divinity, i.e., the recognition of ecological elements as living. The line “and then the power of the moon would grow inside her” (Coelho, 2008, p. 96) showcases Coelho’s attempt at animating conventionally inanimate beings in order to

diversify the ecology in the novel. Furthermore, the lines “studying the movement of both river and stars” (Coelho, 2008, p. 34), “Clouds raced across the sky” (Coelho, 2008, p. 40), and “listening to the sound of the sea” (Coelho, 2008, p. 130) are more such exemplifications of animating the inanimate for portrayal of ecological diversity.

4.2.3. Interdependence

Interdependence is the shared dependency of the diverse life forms in an ecology upon one another. Coelho (2008) portrayed this norm of deep ecology through the mutual dependence of various beings such as the invoking of the spirits in the forest, calling upon moon for its power, and the clearing of clouds in abidance with the human will. These species started resonating with Brida’s life as in the lines “Life was beginning to resemble the clouds she had seen in her trance.” (Coelho, 2008, p. 44) Over the course of her spiritual and magical journey, Brida was dependent on elements from the nature for their power and they were partially bound to her will depending on her strength. “Certain leaves resembled the heart and were good for heart disease, while flowers that resembled eyes could cure diseases of the eye” (Coelho, 2008, p. 98) denote the inseparable link which connects the body to the nature that surrounds it. Additionally, there was interdependence of life forms other than Brida’s upon one another as well. This could be seen in the lines, “there were seagulls flying as high as the clouds and as low as the waves” (Coelho, 2008, p. 140). Figurative devices such as similes were used throughout the text for cementing the bonds between the diverse living beings.

Lastly, it is pertinent to note that Coelho (2008) in his novel incorporated rituals whereby the wizards and witches were in trance with the nature and they were perfectly synchronized (Coelho, 2008, p. 186-193). Upon her arrival at the final stage of her journey disguised as a dance party towards the end of the novel, Brida thought to herself “I’m going into a trance” (Coelho, 2008, p. 189). This ritual was done so to fortify the bond of the people with the spirits and natural elements. In the novel, this was perceived as the final lamination of the body with the spirits and nature. Coelho depicted these rituals as premeditated dance routines which Laidlaw (2021) in his study identified as the crucial feature of attaining a sustainable eco-spirituality. Accordingly, it may be concluded that *Brida* is a

work by Paulo Coelho in which he explores the realm of the divine feminine and embodies it in his protagonist through eco-spiritual means.

5. Conclusion

The present study was a corpus-assisted analysis of feminine divinity under the lens of eco-spirituality in Paulo Coelho's (2008) *Brida*. Within eco-spirituality, the deep ecology framework of Arne Næss (1973) was used in order to identify the existence of eco-spiritual norms in the said work. The corpus tool AntConc 4.2.0 was used for locating key words in context and the concordance lines of selected words. These words were manually identified as nouns, specifically various aspects of nature which were portrayed as eco-animate beings such as that of sun and moon. This helped formulate the nature of relationship of the protagonist with these species and their influence on one another. It was evaluated that the protagonist and the identified life forms, such as sun, moon and cloud to name a few, were highly interdependent. In an analysis of eco-spiritual norms in the novel, three were shortlisted, namely self-realization, diversity, and interdependence. All of these three were found out to have been actively employed in the novel.

Upon further analysis, it was determined that Coelho used dance rituals to symbolize the deepening of the bond between the body and nature, including alternate living beings. This is in congruence with Laidlaw's (2001) study. To answer the research question, "How does Paulo Coelho portray the concept of feminine divinity in his novel *Brida*?" it was discovered that the author portrayed the said belief embodied by the protagonist as an inherent attribute. This embodiment was brought forth by the practice of magical traditions and attainment of a spiritually higher form that was capable of manifesting the power residing in nature. The second question, "How are the eco-spiritual cues surrounding feminine divinity manifested in Paulo Coelho's *Brida*?" was answered by the identification of self-realization, diversity and interconnectedness of the various life forms and the specified instances in which they were realized. In conclusion, *Brida* is a novel that truly manifests the authentic conception of the divine feminine with the help of certain eco-spiritual ideas.

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