

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking

Double-blind Peer-reviewed and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 4 Issue 2 Monsoon Edition 2024 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 134-144

www.literaryherm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Futility of Sensuous Pleasures as Depicted by *Bhagavad Gita* and Paulo Coelho's Novel *Eleven Minutes*

Nagendra Prasad Maurya

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9481-263X>

Corresponding Author: Nagendra Prasad Maurya, Asst. Professor, Department of English Studies and Research, J. S. Hindu (PG) College, Amroha, npmaurya5465@gmail.com

Research Article

Keywords:

Sensuous pleasures, inner peace, orgasm, pleasure worker, lady of the night, sacred sex etc.

Article History

Received:

July 16, 2024

Revised:

July 22, 2024

Accepted:

July 30, 2024



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPL-JLH)



Abstract

Aim: *The present research paper is a comparative study of futility of sensuous pleasures as described by Bhagavad Gita verse 22 of chapter five to the experience of Maria. Maria is a Brazilian girl and the lead character of the present novel. She wanders around various places in search of better fortune and sensuous pleasures. She spends around one year as a sex worker for the sake of earning quick money. Maria engages herself in this profession to buy a plot of land and a comfortable house for her family in Brazil.*

Methodology and Approach: *The qualitative research has been employed in the present research paper. Eleven Minutes by Paulo Coelho has been selected as a primary text for this purpose.*

Outcome: *The novel presents many incidents of Maria's life. She realizes that her clients are searching the inner peace rather than physical pleasures. They could not get this inner peace either in their work or in their families. Many of them just want to talk and share their inner conflicts with her.*

Conclusion and Suggestion: *Maria realizes that earning money by such a menial profession is physically and mentally absorbing her. Finally, she deserts this profession and decides to spend her life with her lover Ralf. These incidents of her life give her a realization that love is the only inspirational source of life and all physical pleasures are temporary and worthless.*

*Correspondence: Nagendra Prasad Maurya, npmaurya5465@gmail.com © (2024) All rights are reserved with the author (s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is properly cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online on www.literaryherm.org and it was published by CaveMark Publications, India.

Paulo Coelho is a renowned Brazilian lyricist and novelist. He employs beautiful symbols to depict the life journey of the lead characters in his novels. Paulo has written around thirty fictions on various themes. He moves deeper into the souls of his characters to inspire them in their life journeys. Because of his unique writing style, Paulo is widely read and has become one of the most loved authors around the globe. His works have been translated into more than 72 languages. He has received many prestigious awards e.g. Crystal Award by World Economic Forum and France's Legion d' Honneur for his contribution to the world of fiction. He is mainly known for his two famous books *The Alchemist* and *Eleven Minutes*. *Eleven Minutes* is the story of a Brazilian girl Maria, who moves to Geneva and works as the lady of night to achieve future fortunes and comforts of her family. She realizes the futility of bodily pleasures after going through these practical experiences. The famous verse 22 of Chapter 5 of *Srimad Bhagvad Gita Yatharup* displays the futility and misery of sensuous or bodily pleasures. It says that the worldly pleasures cannot satisfy the soul because they are temporary and get exhausted soon. One can see it in following lines:

येहिस्पर्शजाभोगादुःखयोनयएवते ।
आद्यन्तवन्तः कौन्तेयनतेषुरमतेबुधः ॥ 22॥

Ye hi sansparśha-jā bhogā duḥkha-yonaya eva te
ādyantavantaḥ kaunteya na teṣhu ramate budhaḥ (S. B. G. Y. 197)

In the above couplet it has been shown that gratifications obtained from sense objects is not concrete and perpetual. They appear to give pleasure superficially, but they contain in themselves the seeds and germs of pain and sorrow. Maria experiences the similar feeling of detachments from the sensuous pleasure after going through many ups and downs during the pursuit of better life in Geneva.

Maria felt a heart break during her childhood as she could not disclose her feelings to one of her schoolmate, when that boy initiated the conversation. And later on the boy left the country and she could not see him again. It was a feeling of repentance that kept on driving her various decisions throughout her life. When the opportunity came to her to travel to Geneva as a Bar Dancer or to work as the lady of night for money, she could not refuse it. Her journey of searching the

sensual pleasure started from here. She could have refused these menial jobs and returned back to her hometown in Brazil, but she decided against it because she thought that people will laugh at her and would speak ill about her when she returned home. She does this job to earn money for her future comforts and family home out of her own wish. One can see her feelings in her diary which she writes after spending a night with an Arabian Man:

I remember everything, although not the moment when I made the decision. Oddly enough, I have no sense of guilt. I used to think of girls who went to bed with men for money as people who had no other choice, and now I see that. It is not like that. I could have said 'yes' or 'no'; no one was forcing me to accept anything. (Paulo 57)

When Maria starts working as a pleasure worker, she experiences many new things about the nature of the men. She realizes that men do not come for sexual pleasures but for sharing their pains and loneliness. Many senior managers, businessmen, pilots, officers, executives come to her because they feel loneliness in their heart. They could neither share their feeling of loneliness with their colleagues nor with their wives. One can notice these details in following lines:

Do you know who the loneliest person in the world is? The executive with a successful career, earning an enormous salary, trusted by those above and below him. The executive, who has every reason to feel wanted and happy, becomes the most miserable creature on the planet. Why, because he has no one to talk to. He is tempted to accept my offer, but he can't talk about it to his work colleagues they would do everything to persuade him to stay. He can't talk about it to his wife who has been his companion to rise up the ladder of success. He can't talk about it to anyone. Can you imagine how that man feels? (Paulo 82-83)

One can see that the super-rich people, who have all the money and comforts in the world to enjoy various sensuous pleasures, feel loneliness and dejection in their inner selves. The similar idea is propagated by the previously mentioned *Bhagavad Gita's* verse. It says that all the sensuous pleasures in the world are temporary and futile; they cannot give permanent relief to the soul of the people.

That's why many wealthy people visit the pleasure workers in search for mental peace. Some of them get temporary relief in making physical relations, while others get the inner peace in talking and sharing their problems with the pleasure girls. Maria realizes the problems of her clients. She reads various books on marital problems, Psychology and Politics to relieve their suffering souls. She made these efforts to please her clients to earn more money. These incidents prove the futility of worldly pleasures and their temporary nature.

One can see another example of the fruitlessness of sensuous pleasures through the life of Ralf Hart, a Swiss Painter in the novel. He meets Maria in a bar, where he is making a painting. He requests Maria to devote her little bit of time for her sketch, that he wants to draw eagerly. He notices inner light on her face. Maria too, is attracted towards him because he gives her proper respect as a human being. Very soon Maria notices the loneliness and disinterestedness that Ralf is facing in his life. He is a famous painter, has a lot of money and fame, a good house, but he is facing emptiness in his heart. He has married three times but has faced divorce every time. He does not feel any urge for physical relations, as his inner desires have dried up at such a younger age. One can see his loneliness in these lines in the novel, when he explains his condition to Maria:

I have my creativity. I have my paintings, which are sought after by galleries all over the world, I have realized my dream, my village thinks of me as a beloved son, my ex –wives never ask me for alimony. I have good health, reasonable looks, everything a man could want. I need you. Do you know what loneliness is? You know what I mean, Maria. Teach me. Perhaps that will save me; perhaps it will save you and bring us both back to life. (Paulo 127-28)

One can see here that Ralf is also suffering from the overuse of sensuous pleasures. He has got everything in his life, yet he is feeling emptiness and exhaustion of all his sensuous urges. Similar view point is mentioned by previously discussed *Bhagavad Gita* Verse. Swami Mukudanand has mentioned the reasons of the uselessness of sensuous pleasures in his description of *Bhagavad Gita*'s verse 22 Chapter 5, in following lines:

The senses create sensations of pleasure in contact with the sense objects. The mind, which is like the sixth sense, derives pleasure from honor, praise, circumstances, success, etc. All these pleasures of body and mind are known as *bhog* (material enjoyment). Such worldly pleasures cannot satisfy the soul because they are finite, and hence the feeling of deficiency remains inherent in them. These pleasures are temporary. Once they finish, they again leave one with the feeling of misery. Worldly pleasures are insentient, and hence they continuously decrease. (Mukudanand)

One can see all the reasons present in the case of Ralf Hart and other people's lives mentioned above. They try to extract happiness either by the material wealth or by the bodily pleasures from someone. Yet they remain unsatisfied despite engaging in so much of gratifications. They all are searching the inner peace very eagerly.

So love is the binding emotion of the most of the characters in the novel. Ralf, Maria, librarian Heidi, Nyah and Milan have the feelings of love and care for the people around them. Ralf loves Maria sincerely from the bottom of his heart. He tells her not to follow the path of suffering and punishment to attain pleasure as told by Terence. Maria is so much impressed by his love and affection that she decides to bring back the passion and enthusiasm in him. She makes many attempts and is able to rejuvenate him sensually. He makes physical love with her and gave her the orgasm many times. One can notice here that Maria has become a saintly figure, who cares for the sufferings and loneliness of people. She tries her level best to alleviate the mental pains of the people who visited her. She could have just given the physical pleasures and earned money from it, but she uses deeper understanding of the mental suffering and loneliness to help them. Maria does not get involved with her clients emotionally, yet she tries her level best to soak their pains and give them relief. She toils hard to provide mental comforts to her clients, for this she studies various books on Psychology, human relations and physical pleasures. Librarian Heidi is very friendly to Maria, as she takes great care of her. She considers Maria as her daughter and friend and advises her on various issues. Nyah is the fellow pleasure worker of Maria. She

warns her many times and tells her to leave that profession and go back home. Maria does not consider it and remains there in that profession. Milan is the owner of the pleasure club, where Maria and other pleasure workers work. He is a married person and never indulges himself physically with his co-workers. He takes proper care of the pleasure workers of his club and treats them with respects. Milan cautions them not to indulge emotionally with their clients, as it will give them mental pain. One can see that most of the characters find solace and peace through the emotional connection and feelings of care and togetherness. These examples solidify the idea of *Bhagavad Gita* verse, which relinquishes the idea of sensual pleasures. It further propagates the idea of human bondage through love and care, as it can give emotional support into this mortal world. One can see that all the characters in the novel suffer from emptiness in their souls despite enjoying all the pleasures. They get occasional happiness or relief by the love and care that they show to each other. Love is important for the survival of all living being because it gives them strength and belief to bear the mental pains and sufferings and propels them out of their hard times. Human beings always long for the love and affection from others. Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore lays the importance of love in his poem no. 36 of *Gitanjali*, *Song Offering to God*:

THIS is my prayer to thee, my lord—strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.
(*Gitanjali*, XXXVI)

In this poem Tagore prays to God to put an end to poverty of the spirit and help him to rise above all else to serve God with love and true feelings. He says that his prayer to God is that God striking at the very root, the very beginning remove his spiritual poverty. He prays that God grant him strength to bear his joy and

sorrows and yet not be too affected by them. He then prays that God again grant him strength that his love would be used in the service of God and thus be fruitful. Tagore goes on to pray for strength that would make him strong before the arrogant and proud and never bow before them or ever to be weak and disown the poor. He also prays for strength to raise himself above the insignificant daily events. And finally asks for strength and will to completely surrender to the service of God.

One can see through the character of Maria the similar trait of good deeds, as mentioned in above verse. She has dedicated her life for the general welfare of people. Maria is a pleasure worker but she tries her level best to give inner peace to the people. Some people may raise objection that she does this for money. But one should remember here that a sex worker is generally not in such frame of mind to give such type of mental peace to people. She accepts in the novel that she gets only 11 minutes to judge and help her clients. She did not ask extra money for this. She is content in receiving only the 350 Francs that she receives from every customer. Best part of her character is her equanimity shown to her every client. She does not behave extraordinarily to a higher paying client and lowly to an ordinary paying client. Although she does not get attached with her clients emotionally, yet she is able to show proper love and affection to them. This love and affection relieves the loneliness and suffering of her clients. This is the reason why Ralf Hart is able to see special light in her. Maria becomes uncomfortable on hearing this as she is a sex worker and a person is seeing inner light in her. She opposes him in these lines in the novel: "I can't understand otherwise how you could possibly say that you could see a special Light in a woman who, as you discovered while you were painting, IS NOTHING, BUT A PROSTITUTE!" (Paulo 107)

Here it is necessary to mention that the light noticed by Ralf, was the light of her good deeds. She thought that she was doing a menial and deplorable job of a sex worker, but her deeds of right thinking and acts of helping others, have given a light of saintliness. Here one can notice the famous quotation from *as A Man Thinketh* by James Allen on the beauty of good deeds:

The outer conditions of a person's life will always be found to be harmoniously related to his inner state...Men do not attract that which they want, but that which they are. Their whims, fancies and ambitions are thwarted at every step, but their inmost thoughts and desires are fed with their own food, be it foul or clean. (James 15)

The above mentioned quote solidifies the good luck and fortune of Maria as she gets Ralf as her life partner at the ending of the novel, and it gives happy ending to the novel. Maria is in a wrong and immoral profession, yet her inner most thoughts of helping her clients sincerely, made her a good woman. This is the reason why Ralf sees light in her eyes and she gets the lifelong companionship of Ralf. Maria does not know the reason of Ralf's kindness and love towards her throughout the whole novel in spite of thorough soul searching, while the reasons are her good deeds, helping others and noble thoughts, as mentioned by above quote from James Allen's book.

Sexual experience is one of the major themes of the present novel. Maria has to make physical relations with many people because of her profession. It is an irony that pleasure workers are produced by the society for their pleasure, yet people consider it as heinous crime. One can see that many top business executives, managers, bankers used to visit the bar where Maria worked. They found mental peace in to the company of these sex workers. Sex is considered taboo in most of the societies. People secretly love to listen about it but they do not want to acknowledge. Many religious preachers and social institutions condemned sex as dirty and forbidden, due to that a general misconception aroused in people about its uselessness. Every coin has two sides. In the same way sex too can be sacred or ugly. Sex is a beautiful emotional force when it remains within the limits of the person but it takes an ugly shape when it becomes uncontrollable. One can see that many people take lives or risk their reputation when their sexual desires become uncontrollable. Famous author Napoleon Hill propagates the idea of transmuting the sexual energy into a positive form in his book *Think and Grow Rich*. He says that sexual energy can be transmuted in creative ways to find better results. One can understand his views in these lines:

The transmutation of sex energy calls for the exercise of will power, to be sure but the reward is worth the effect. The desire for sexual expression is inborn and natural. The desire cannot, and should not be submerged or eliminated. But it should be given an outlet through forms of expression which enrich the body, mind and spirit of man. If not given this form of outlet, through transmutation, it will seek outlets through purely physical channels. (Napoleon 190)

Napoleon Hill talks about formulating the sexual energy into other useful and creative forms in the above mentioned lines. While, there are some scholars, who talk about using sexual energy in its purer form. They do not favor its transmutation. According to this school of thought Sex itself is a sacred thing, they refer it as Sacred Sex. Maria finds out about Sacred Sex, when she searches deep about the physical pleasures. She discusses about it with her lover Ralf Hart, who explains her about it. It is a term which clears the misconception that sex is dirty, forbidden and wrong. Famous author Lucius Nothing wrote about Sacred Sexuality in his famous article named *Sacred Sexuality: A Guide to Physical Emotional and Spiritual Wellness* writes about the importance of Sacred Sex in these words:

Sacred sexuality is the practice of incorporating spiritual and emotional element into sexual experiences in order to strengthen one's connection to oneself, one's partner, and the divine. Sacred sexuality has been practiced in various cultures and religions throughout history, including Tantra in Hinduism and Buddhism and sacred eroticism in ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Greece. Sexuality is regarded as a sacred and necessary part of life in many indigenous cultures, and it is honoured and celebrated in rituals and ceremonies. The goal of sacred sexuality is to connect with a higher power and achieve transcendence through the energy of sex.. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, sacred sexuality seeks to elevate the experience by connecting with oneself, one's partner, and cosmic energy, and by using the sexual act as a tool for personal and spiritual development. (Lucius)

Sacred sex takes place between true lovers or life partners. One can see in the novel that Maria has made physical relations with many of her clients, yet she never felt orgasm with anyone. But when she makes physical relations with Ralf she experiences orgasm 3-4 times within the same night. One can see the difference between normal physical relation and sacred sex in the present novel. When Maria sleeps with her clients it is a normal sex or ordinary sex that is considered dirty or deplorable, as she is not connected with them emotionally. But she is connected emotionally with Ralf so her sexual activity with him, comes under the table of sacred sex. Here it is evident that sensuous pleasures may be futile but when they are intermingled with the emotional and spiritual feelings they provide more comfort and peace to the soul.

To conclude, most of the characters in the novel don't find mental peace despite enjoying so much of sensuous pleasure. The business executives, managers, bankers and other rich people, who have got great success in their lives, suffer from loneliness in their lives. They could not share their problems with their wives or subordinates. So they visit the Pleasure girls, who provide some amount of comfort in their lives. It shows the affirmation of Bhagavad Gita's verse, which suggests the futility and temporary nature of sensuous pleasures. Maria, who is a Pleasure Worker, provides proper relief to her clients through her love and care for them. Her good deeds are recognized by Ralf, who starts loving her. Maria experiences sexual relations with many of her clients, but she does not get the feeling of contentment with anyone because she was not emotionally connected with them. She finds this deep gratification only in physical union with her lover Ralf. It is not the physical love which comforts her but the emotional connection which gives her the feeling of deep satisfaction. Her physical relation with Ralf is considered sacred sex because they are united physically, emotionally and spiritually with each other. With above mentioned incidents in the novel it can be said that the sensual pleasures are temporary and they are the reasons of mental pain and suffering. Good deeds, love and care are the real virtues that provide some amount of relief to the suffering souls in the world.

Works Cited& Consulted

- Allen, James. *As a Man Thinketh*. QFORD India, 2011.
- Ash, Jackie. "Gitanjali Poem No. 36- Summary and Analysis" Blog August 2021,
<https://www.englishliterature.info/2021/08/gitanjali-poem-36-summary-analysis.html>. Accessed 12 Sep 2024.
- Coelho, Paulo. *Eleven Minutes*. Harper Collins, 2024.
- Hill, Napoleon. *Think and Grow Rich*. Jaico Publishing House, 2021
- Mukundananda, Swami. "Bhagavad Gita-The Song of God" Commentary 2014,
<https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org.html>. Accessed 12 Sep 2024.
- Nothing, Lucius. "Sacred Sexuality: A Guide to Physical Emotional and Spiritual Wellness" Article, <https://www.accessnewage.com/sacred-sexuality/>.html. Accessed 13 Sep 2024.
- Prabhupad, S. Bhaktivedanta. *Bhagavad Gita As It Is*. Intermex Publishing, 2006.
- Tilak, Raghukul. *Rabindranath Tagore:Gitanjali*. Rama Brothers, 2002.

Nagendra Prasad Maurya

Dr. Nagendra Prasad Maurya is serving as Senior Assistant Professor of English at J. S. Hindu (P.G) College Amroha, UP. Nagendra has completed his Ph.D (English) from Shri Venkateshwara University Gajraula, UP. Nagendra has presented a dozen of papers in various national and departmental seminars and acted as a resource person in a couple of them. He has defended the national aerospace by serving in Indian Air Force for 20 years. Nagendra is a motivational speaker and a soft skill trainer.