



## PAULO COELHO'S - *THE ALCHEMIST*: A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF

Dr. ALKA A. BHISE

Associate Professor,

Department of English,

Indirabai Meghe Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Amaravati. (M.S.)



### ABSTRACT

Poulo Coelho is the most published Brazilian author of all time. He has published 30 books. His all novels are rooted in his life experiences. Some of his novels like 'The Alchemist', 'The Aleph and The Zahirare' autobiographical in nature though they are termed as fictional.

Coelho's 'The Alchemist' which is considered as a world classic established his worldwide reputation. 'The Alchemist' was noted as one of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century most important literary phenomenon since Coelho entered for the second time in the Guinness Book of Records in Oct.2008. The present paper proposes to evaluate Coelho's 'The Alchemist' as a novel that reflects his personal experiences in learning alchemy for eleven years. The main character, Santiago, who goes to a faraway country just to pursue his dream. The journey completely changes the life of a Shepherd and his vision of life.

Key Words – Poulho Coelho, -The Alchemist-, Personal Legend- Journey toward self, Vision of life.

Paulo Coelho is one among such writers who is the most widely published Brazilian author of all time. In total he has published 30 books, three of them are autobiographical, while majority of others are fictional. However all these novels are rooted in his life experiences? In total he has sold more than 150 million books in over 150 countries worldwide and his works have been translated in 80 languages. The recipient of numerous prestigious international awards. he is a story teller with a power to inspire nations and to change people lives.

Besides being an internationally acclaimed author, Coelho is an outspoken activist for peace and social justice. He is messenger of peace for the UN, an ambassador to the European Union for International Dialogue, A member of the board for the Shimon Peres Institute for Peace.

Coelho was born on August 24, 1947 into a middle class family in Rio de Janerio. He attended school run by the Jesuits, in accordance with the wishes of his parents, who were devout Catholics. However Coelho was a willful and rebellious child. He aspired to pursue a career as a writer - a career that his father, a pragmatic engineer, found wholly undesirable. In his late teens Coelho was committed to a Psychiatric Institution by his parents, who interpreted his literary ambitions as a sign of instability.

In 1967, Coelho reached an understanding with his parents and in order to fulfill their standards for practical and respectable profession, entered Law School.

Coelho's *The Alchemist* which is considered as a world classic established his worldwide reputation. *The Alchemist* was noted as one of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century most important literary phenomenon. Since Coelho entered for the second time in the Guinness Book of records in Oct. 2008 with his book 'The Alchemist' as, the most translated book in the world ( in 67 languages) . It has been edited in more than 150 countries and so far 35 million copies have been sold. It is a novel that is rich of metamorphic language and it reflects Coelho's personal experiences in learning alchemist for 11 years. The main character, Santiago, who goes to a faraway country just to pursue his dream, actually reflects the author who never gave up and followed in his dream to be writer despite many difficulties that encountered on his road to success.

Paulo believes that God has assigned a particular role to each individual and it is his/her duty to perform that role by following his dreams. Through this novel he tells us how each of us has a specific Personal Legend, though most of us do not realize it.

The book is divided in two parts- The first part portrays how the boy comes to know Personal Legend by interpreting the Omens and ends with the boy's determination to follow his dream by overcoming the misfortunes and being the main force in controlling his own destiny. Part two describes his material as well as spiritual journey and describes with how he finally comes to know and his realization where the treasure actually is.

Santiago is a shepherd whose purpose in life is to travel. However his parents want him to become a priest which is matter of pride for them. Ever since his childhood, he wishes to know the world and for him this is much more important than knowing God and knowing man's sins. He is haunted by a recurrent dream in which a child transports him to the Egyptian Pyramids with the words, "If you have come here you find a treasure". (P. 14) The boy is well versed in Latin, Spanish, and theology. He is wise enough to analyze that possible of a dream come true that makes life interesting.( P.11) The dream makes him feel something is missing in his life. His heart craves for the essential spiritual needs that he was to fulfill and thus to achieve pure happiness. He decides to leave his house and family to roam alone. His father reluctantly permits him by giving him enough money to buy flock. He chooses to be a shepherd, the profession that could allow him to wander from place to place.

He meets an old woman who interprets dreams as the language of God. She tells him if he speaks in the language of the soul the person can understand its there meaning. She tells him that he must go to the Pyramids in Egypt and there he will find the treasure. For this interpretation she asks him to give one tenth of treasure in return.

Next, he meets Melchizedec, an old king of Salem and tells Santiago not to let fate govern his life. He asks Santiago his purpose of being Shepherd. Santiago tells that "I like to travel (P. 23 ) Melchizedec explains whatever the hurdle may be", when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.(p.23) The boy understands that this is the time he needs to fulfill his dream. Psychologist consider dream as a expression of the secrete, unconscious desires of human psyche. It is the dream that initiates Santiago's discovery of self . Even though he could not exactly define what is dream really conveys, he realizes the need of undertaking a long journey to reach out his own sublime self. Melchizedec gives two stones called Urim and Thummim. He advises Santiago to read omens but to make his own decisions and trust himself. "If God leads the sheep so well, he will also lead man". (P.37) with this optimism Santiago begins his journey. He is looted by a young man. He becomes frustrated. However he regains his confidence by his positive thinking.

He meets a crystal merchant who talks about his dream of pilgrimages to Mecca. But does not want to move to fulfill his dream. He is happy with what he has. Commenting on the contrast between Santiago and the crystal merchant, Mriiliini Taker observes 1) "In this way, Coelho captures the drama of human beings who sacrifice fulfillment to conformity. Only few people choose to follow the road that has been made for them and find God while searching for their mission on earth".

Nearly a year after his arrival in Africa, Santiago has earned enough money. One morning he makes up his mind to return to Tarifa and by large sheep flock. This is a moment of decision making for Santiago. He

decides to go back and starts packing his belongings. He finds the pouch given by the old shepherd. It reminds him all the king's statement. Ultimately comes to the conclusion. I can always go back to be a shepherd. But may I'll never have another chance to get the pyramids in Egypt.(P.61) He feels determined to continue his Personal Legend and moves on his way. He joins a group travelling with a desert caravan. He meets an Englishman who is on his way to meet an alchemist residing in desert. The Englishman serves both a friend and contrast to Santiago. While the Englishman is lost in theory, Santiago believes in the practical aspect of life. He represents that class of educated men who rely more on the bookish knowledge rather than their instinct. Santiago's meeting the Englishman helps him to understand all the knowledge of the art of alchemy encompasses the Master Work that involves the transformation of lead into gold. Santiago's treasure hunt also becomes his spiritual journey as he decides to learn about the soul of the world. He begins to understand the Language of the world in a better way and pays attention to minute details.

The next phase of his spiritual journey takes him to an oasis as the caravan must stop at the oasis because of the tribal war in the desert. The caravan has no choice but to carry on and hope for the best. Santiago keeps on learning new experiences. At a neutral place called Al-Fayuum. Santiago meets his soul mate named Fatima. As soon as Santiago approaches her, he notices her beauty and falls instantly in love with her. Here Coelho narrates the power of love and vital role it plays in one's life.

Santiago's love for Fatima is another important step in Santiago's quest for his Personal Legend. Fatima too reaffirms Santiago's faith in his Personal Legend.: "I am a part of your dream, a part of your destiny as you call it. That's why I want to continue your goal. ( P.102)

Coelho believes that when we love, we always try to improve ourselves and that is when everything is possible and thus true love cannot prevent us from walking our path and following our dream. For him everything in the world starts making sense. Coelho writes

"When you are in love, things make even more sense" (P.95)

After meeting Fatima, Santiago again stands at a road with two diversions and he has to choose one. He seems to be quite reluctant about following his dreams. "I have found my treasures. I have Fatima. She is a treasure greater than anything else. The alchemist makes him realize the essence of true love. "Love never keeps a man from pursuing his destiny; If he abandons that pursuit, it is because it wasn't true love. (P.115) Fatima becomes treasure for him. But she understands his need to follow his dream and asks him to realize his goal with other hope and courage; he is able to transcend his journey with renewed enthusiasm. Santiago's spiritual consciousness evolves as he continues his journey, with the alchemist. He faces many difficulties and overcomes all. The alchemist's lesson that action is the only source of knowledge motivates Santiago. Moreover the Alchemist has told him that there is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve, the fear of failure.

According to Jyoti Mishra, As Santiago's journey integrating his physical self with the spiritual self, he gets liberated from his old, narrow perceptions and moves to a larger awareness of life a grander experience of the self and establishes a greater connectivity with the universe. Santiago is thus undergoing an amazing metamorphosis from an ordinary shepherd self to a nobler self of an alchemist 2 (190-191) (reference – Mishra Jyoti – Coelho's Fiction – Existential & spiritual Preoccupation: - Select study of Seven Novels. Germany LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing GmbH & co. KG 2012 Print.

Before leaving, the alchemist prepares gold from lead and divides it into four parts. He gives one part to the monk, one to Santiago and keeps one for himself. He gives fourth part to the monk to keep for Santiago in case he needs in future. He dissuades Santiago from discovery of the treasure is now complete. The end of the novel is the masterstroke by Coelho. Santiago's return journey is not described but directly we find him in Spain at the same church. His native Andalusian plains and full asleep, contemplating the strange way god has guided him to the treasure. He plans to head to Tarifa. Thus ultimately he learns that his treasure lies not at the pyramids, as his dream foretold, but back at the abandoned church where his journey began. His realization has powerful implications about the importance of looking into the roots and foundation of our lives. Santiago's journey for the treasure makes his inward journey to find his true self possible and both

merge in his ultimate realization of the truth of life that is often simple and always within our grasp. All we need is faith in our "Personal Legend".

In the Theory of Human Motivation, Maslow describes self-actualization as:

What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization. It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment namely, to the tendency for him to, become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything than one is capable of becoming". (370)

Alchemy, has been associated with two main activities: to attempt to when ingested would result in great vitality and health, and possibly even immortality. Chinese everlasting life. Santiago gives up his wealth for his quest. When he sets out. He does so in hope of finding even more wealth just as a base becomes a more valuable metal through alchemy. As in the process of alchemy where base metals like lead is transformed into gold having byproducts Elixir of life and the Philosopher's Stone, the spiritual transformation in the boy transform him from a shepherd to a wise man with profound knowledge and deeper understanding of the cosmos. The Gold symbolizes the spiritual wealth he finally gains. Regarding this Joyati Mishra points out, "Santiago himself is no less a symbol of alchemy". He is a symbolic blend of the base metal, which is quotation of life of a shepherd and the gold that is spiritual wealth he finally gains."

We also see over and over in the book that those willing to pursue their Personal Legends enjoy material success in addition to the spiritual upliftment they achieve.

Santiago's journey from Spain to the Pyramids and then back to Spain makes him find the treasure of life. In order to arrive at his treasure he transforms himself time to time. He first learns to accept change to consider its simplicity, to trust his experiences of day to day life over bookish knowledge, to understand the significant of suffering to overcome fear to recognize the meaning of love and most important to live in the present moment, read Gold's will in signs and Omens, listen to his heart, and penetrate the soul of the world.

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