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JOURNEY AS A METAPHOR FOR LIFE IN PAULO COELHO'S 'ALCHEMIST'

Vaishali R. Deshmukh

Associate Professor in English, Shri Shivaji Arts and Commerce College, Amravati.

ABSTRACT:

Everyone is curious about life and encounters number of question in a span of life. We all want to know about the reality and purpose behind our existence. "Why are we born?", "What is the purpose of our life?", "Why do we suffer?", "What is the meaning of life?", "How to decide what is right and what is wrong?", and "what is our ultimate destination?". Paulo Coelho writes his novels with strong universal themes dealing with the basic questions that we have been asking. . They deal with the deeper corners of life that shy away from our routine existence.

In his novels, the journey symbolizes the spiritual transformation that takes place in the protagonists. This journey begins from the material self and ends up in the realization of the spiritual self. The most endearing aspect of his novels rests on his belief that spirituality is not to be found in the temple or the church .Neither it requires a secluded life of an ascetic but it comes with the love and service of one's fellowmen. For him life is a long journey which begins with doubts, passes through the experiences of pleasures and pains and ultimately reaches its destination through the participation in humble activities of daily life.

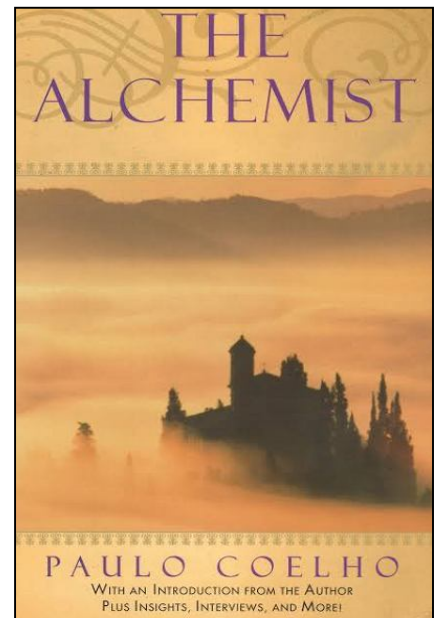
KEY WORDS: Paulo Coelho, Journey as a metaphor.

INTRODUCTION

The novel *The Alchemist* deals with the rediscovery of self through the physical as well as spiritual journey. The journey undertaken in this novel highlights the urge of the protagonists to understand the meaning of life.

As Jyoti Mishra points out in her book entitled *Paulo Coelho's Fiction Existential and Spiritual Preoccupation*:

"The development of an individual's spirituality depends upon questioning the way one related to the taken-for-granted concepts or meanings which are disclosed to the self. These meanings



and purposes accepted as 'given' never require questioning until an existential crisis makes one aware of their existence. So the development of spirituality requires such awareness of realizing various possibilities of meaning." (94)

The Alchemist is a novel that is rich of metaphorical language and it reflects Coelho's personal experiences in learning alchemy for eleven 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 his dream to be writer despite many difficulties he encountered on his road to success.

In an interview with Amina Choudary Coelho says:

"I think that the book itself, *The Alchemist*, was a metaphor of my own life. When I was 40, I wrote my first book, *The Pilgrimage*, and I said to myself, "why did it take so long for me to write this book?" Because my dream, since I was 10 years old, was to be a writer. I said, I have to revisit my life using a metaphor, and the metaphor was basically this boy that has a dream and has to go far away to realize that his dream is close to him. And everything is a matter of courage.

So, when I wrote *The Alchemist*, I thought that I should revisit my life. I was not searching for my treasure. My treasure is my journey, the same as for the shepherd boy. When I wrote *The Alchemist*, I decided that I have to continue my journey."

The novel which is in the format of a fable has a simple structure. It is the story of Santiago in search of his dream of finding out treasure.. Coelho narrates the story of Santiago in simple sentences almost reading like aphorisms and lays down the basic requirements for the understanding of life- the wisdom of listening to one's heart, understanding the meaning of omens, and above all persistently following one's dreams. Paulo believes that God has assigned a particular role to each individual and it's his/ her duty to perform that role by following his dreams. Through this novel he tells how each of us has a specific personal legend, though most of us do not realize it. But the most important message that the novel gives is he that though we do not know what our treasure will be, or where and how we will receive it, if we follow our heart, we will find it. The novel is an optimistic assertion of the individual's ability to accomplish something seemingly impossible.

The part one of the story tells us how the boy comes to know his 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 how he finally comes to know where the treasure actually is.

The action of the novel begins with the boy, along with his sheep, deciding to spend the night at an abandoned church .The interesting fact about the novel is that the opening of the novel is linked with the end of it as scene where the novels ends is the same one where it has started. The span between the opening and the end is filled with a lot of characters and happenings that would completely change the life of Santiago and his vision of life. Between this span he faces many obstacles, meets people, solve mysteries and ultimately realizes his dream.

According to Jyoti Mishra :

"As Santiago journeys 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." (190-191)

Thus ultimately Santiago learns that his treasure lies not at the pyramids, as his dream has 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."

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 evolution they achieve.

Santiago's journey from Spain to the Pyramids and then back to Spain makes him find the treasure in life. In order to arrive at his treasure he transforms himself from time to time. He first learns to accept change, to consider its simplicity, to trust his experience of day to day life over bookish knowledge, to understand the significance of suffering, to overcome fear, to recognize the meaning of love and most importantly never to lose sight of his goal. He also learns to live in the present moment, read God's will in signs and omens, listen to his heart, and penetrate the Soul of the World .

Although Santiago has to wander and cross the vast desert, face the obstacles in the form of robbers and war in his effort to find the hidden treasure, he patiently follows all the hints he could get and overcome all the spectacles, including the ones that threaten his own life. In his pursuit of dream, he is constantly subjected to tests of his persistence and courage. He never pushes himself forward impulsively as he understands that by doing so he would fail to see the signs and omens left by god along his path. He is able to do so as is sure that he will get the real happiness. Moreover he has to choose between options his offered him and every time he chose wisely following his heart.

Thus *Alchemist* presents Coelho's vision of life through his handling of journey as a metaphor of life. It deals with rediscovery of self through the physical as well as spiritual journey. The journey undertaken in this novel highlights the urge of the protagonist to understand the meaning of life

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