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Spiritual Quest in Paulo Coelho's *The Fifth Mountain* and *The Alchemist*

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Abstract

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian by novelist of great renown. He has been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for his magnum opus *The Alchemist*. His fourth major publication *The Fifth Mountain* share the same theme of the quest for survival and struggle for the realization of the desired goal, his effort to prove that Yahweh is greater than all other gods, and make it comparable to *The Alchemist*. It deals with the philosophy of mind in developing an argument within oneself. Finally he realizes that his destiny is not being chosen by him but by God and ultimately, He decides to abide by his own desires and will. In this way Coelho suggests that Elijah was able to reach an ultimate level of spiritual awareness and have the most powerful relationship with God. He comes to spiritual perfection through different stages.

Paulo Coelho's *The Fifth Mountain* and *The Alchemist* deal with the individual quests of their protagonists, Santiago and Elijah respectively. While Santiago pursues a treasure in his dream, Elijah is after his ideal of establishing the supremacy of the God. He worships and affirming his faith. Both the protagonists are after something and their journey is filled with dangers and difficulties. Santiago in *The Alchemist* dreams of pursuing a precious treasure through an exotic journey crossing his homeland, Spain and travelling the dry Egyptian desert along. In *The Fifth Mountain* the ordinary person becomes a prophet. He is depicted as an ordinary man who falls in love with a widow in Akbar. He suffers from a conflict between love and duty. But he is a prophet. The surprising fact is that both the protagonists find their objects in the very same places they started from.

These novels expound a direct connection or correspondence between the universal and the individual soul. The purpose of human life is the union of soul with god. These two novels hold dream as the highest human facility that facilitates the attainment of spiritual achievements and goals. Through the protagonists of the novels, Santiago and the prophet Elijah, the relationship between people and universe is gradually exposed. Santiago says himself, "I am an adventurer, Looking for a treasure"(40). Even when the Englishmen talks about war and weapons Santiago's mind is filled with his dream.

The author gives a peripheral narration of the characteristics of the characters and allows a deeper psychological insight into their spiritual development too. The shepherd boy in *The Alchemist* whose journey for material treasure turns into a life changing experience of spiritual transformation. Through this novel, the author wants to give the message that the real treasure is hidden within the human heart; there is no need to make a search for it outside. This novel is a fiction of self- discovery, the tale of a boy, who has a dream and a courage to follow it. After listening to the signs, the boy ventures in his personal journey of exploration and self-discovery, symbolically searching for a hidden treasure located near the Pyramids in Egypt.

Santiago's quest starts at a material level and runs through the spiritual realm and ends in the stage of the supreme goal of life and self- realization. Through this realization the protagonists Santiago reaches the state of pure 'consciousness', where the relationships among man, universe and God is realized as an inseparable whole.

Santiago selects the path of action, knowledge and devotion to know about himself, the universe and God in the material world by travel as against his parents wish:

His parents had wanted him to become a priest, and thereby a source of pride for a simple firm family. They worked hard just to have food and water, like the sheep. He had studied Latin, Spanish and Theology. But ever since he had been a child, he had wanted to know the world and this was much more important to him than knowing God and knowing about man's sins. One afternoon, on a visit to his family, he had summoned up the courage to tell his father that he didn't want to become a priest. That he wanted to travel. (8).

He desires direct experience from the whole world because, to him, life is a stream of experience. Santiago's purpose in life, travel, creates a desire in him to leave the house. He comes in front of his father and tells that he wants to travel. His father though permits him to leave the house, tells him:

People from all over the world have passed through this village, son... they come in search of new things. But when they leave they are basically the same people they were when they arrived. They climb the mountain to see the castle, and they wind up thinking that the past was better than what he have now. They have bond hair, or dark skin, but basically they are the same as the people who live right here. (8)

The boy leaves his home and everything; and he becomes a shepherd to seek his life's treasure. He has preferred to become a shepherd instead of becoming a priest. "He should have decides to become a shepherd" (21) He adds:

His parents had wanted him to become a priest, and thereby a source of pride for a simple farm family. They worked hard just to have food and water like the sheep. He had studied Latin, Spanish and Theology. But ever since he had been a child, he had wanted to know the world, and this was much more important to him than knowing God and learning about mans sins. One afternoon on a visit to his family, he had

summoned up the courage to tell his father that he didn't want to become a priest. That he wanted to travel. (8)

He would have self-realization if only he becomes a shepherd. The Gypsy of tarifa tells the boy that his fortune is hidden at the pyramids. The journey of the boy is not going to become an easy and simple one. The conversation between Santiago and the young man in the desert shows it:

You have to cross the entire Sahara street, said the young man. "And do that, you need money, I need to know whether you have enough". The boy thought it a strange question. But he trusted in the old man, who had said that when you really want something the universe always conspires in your favour. (34) Omens also play a part in Santiago's journey. The oldman, Melchizedek tells the boy, "In order to follow the treasure, you will have to follow the omens. God has prepared a path for everyone to follow. You just have to read the omens that he left for you"(28). The ordinary boy becomes a shepherd. He has been in the seminary but now he has become a traveler. He was studying theology and sins of others but now he is learning the ways of the world. This is the initial change in him.

The boy decides to go back to his country and the author says that the treasure was now nothing but a painful memory and he tries to avoid thinking about it. The boy express his desires thus:

You have been a real blessing to me. Today I understand something. I didn't see before: Every blessing ignored becomes a curse. I don't want everything else in life. But you are forcing me to look at wealth and at horizons I have never known. Now that I have seen them, and now that I see how immense my possibilities are, I'm going to feel worse than I did before you arrived. Because I know the things I should be able to accomplish, and I don't want to do so. (55)

At the same time the boy is talking about the important of his treasure. He says, "But I'm going in search of my treasure" (148).

Pursuit of any quest requires purpose, patience and perseverance. The road to success is never so easy. Through the novel *The Alchemist*, Paulo Coelho expresses the toughness of the journey in the words of the camel driver:

The animals were exhausted, and the men talked among themselves less and less. The silence was the worst aspect of the night, when the mere groan of a camel- which before had been nothing but the groan of a camel- now frightened everyone, because it might be signal a raid.(80).

Santiago possesses the qualities such as humility, unpretentiousness, purity, constancy, self knowledge, self control, balance of mind in desirable or undesirable things, non- attachment, resorting to solitary space, disinterested in gathering and perception of true knowledge which are necessary to achieve self- realization. The old man says, "Because there is a force that wants you to realize your destiny: it whets your appetite with a taste of success" (27)

Santiago's path is that of true knowledge because throughout the journey he uses all the means such as direct perception, inference, comparison and the tradition to gain knowledge. Throughout his direct perception, he masters the art of shepherding. He sees that the presence of certain plants indicates the presence of water. Similarly the presence of certain birds indicates the presence of snake. Thus he uses all the means available to acquire knowledge in order to cross the desert.

The boy Santiago compares himself to the alchemist. Alchemy is about the conversion of lower metals to higher, while spiritual enlightenment is to raise consciousness from lower level to the higher. Through this he understands that when people strive to become better than what they are, everything around them becomes better too. In the beginning of the journey, he promises in the name of Jesus Christ that he will abide by the rules and never ever serve from his pursuit. In his conversation with the wind, the wind says that he can't be the wind.

Santiago's path is of true devotion because he always respects the hand that wrote everything and his life activities are completely devoted to the ideal he had set knowing the world, which includes the consideration for all the created beings along with the created world or universe

Life is stated as continuous cycle of three states of consciousness such as waking, dream and deep sleep. Like every human being, Santiago also undergoes through these states as one who is awake, he experiences the waking world which consists of things, beings emotions and thoughts. In the waking world, he experiences different pleasant and the unpleasant things and thinks of issues such as whether the Andalusian girl might be getting married to a better person than him or not, whether to sell his sheep to go to Africa, whether he should go back to Andalusia with the money earned from the Chrystal shop in Africa, whether to leave Fathima to go in search of treasurer, whether to tell the leader of the tribal about the reason for him digging near the pyramid. The entire waking world disappears soon after the consciousness of waking state levels.

In the dream state, he becomes the dreamer of experiences. The dream world which provides him the vision of a treasure near the Egyption pyramids. This dream world also disappears when the dream state of conscious levels

In the deep sleep, state of unconsciousness, like any other deep sleeper, he experience, sleep without dreams along with a blankness of nothingness, which also disappears with the departure of the deep sleep in the desert, once he feels that his heart began to tell him things that came from the soul of the world. It says that all

people who are happy have God within them and that happiness could be found even in a grain of sand because the universe has taken millions of years to create it, Likewise everyone in this universe has a treasure awaiting him.

The story of *The Fifth Mountain* may be considered religious in focus, despite a strong focus on the theme of rebellion against God. In this book Coelho has explored the manner in which the prophetic questioning of authority, rebellion and liberation, and thinking for oneself are important in one's relationship with God and one's life work.

At the same time the novel is a powerful Metaphor of human self confidence and strong desire for self-fulfillment by helping other humans. The protagonist finds ultimately the strength to overcome all misfortunes in himself- in his deeply human desire to help the others and to be creative. And he finds out that God is in your own heart

Elijah is very complaint, obeying everything God's angel say. Eventually he realizes that his destiny is not being chosen by him but by God and ultimately, He decides to abide by his own desires and will. In this way Coelho suggests that Elijah was able to reach an ultimate level of spiritual awareness and have the most powerful relationship with God. He comes to spiritual perfection through different stages.

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