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The self-realization of Santiago in Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist

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Article Information Received: April 20, 2022 Revised: June 20, 2022 Accepted: June 25, 2022 Available Online: July 30, 2022	Abstract <i>In the novel, Paulo Coelho takes on the man's old quest for self-realization. This study suggests the method preached by Paulo Coelho to acquire knowledge about the Self. Paulo Coelho's novel The Alchemist is a tale about a Spanish boy, confronted by a quest for treasure. This internal conflict intrigues him to embark on a journey for a treasure hunt. The tale is more of an allegory, a story within a story. He is on a treasure hunt. But deep inside he seeks to find the treasure that lies inside him. The current study on the novel intends to search for the execution plan, adopted by the protagonist in realizing his journey towards self-realization. The researchers have applied the Close Reading technique to analyze Santiago's journey towards self-realization. Thematic analysis has been employed to seek the protagonist's journey towards self-realization.</i>
Keywords Self-realization Quest Destiny Empowerment Dreams	
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1.1 Introduction

Human beings are by far the most enigmatic and intricate creatures. The majority of us are like animals, without any justification for our existence, most of us are in hot pursuit of our basic instincts. The majority take life the way it is, without carving their destination with thought and action. Whereas there is a handful in humanity, that have made it possible for the human being to be granted the status of being a supreme creature. This status has been achieved by constant thought to improve and consequently devise the necessary execution plan to achieve that goal.

The journey of Santiago kicks off with a dream of a treasure hunt in which he was sleeping beside the rubble of an old and abandoned chapel. A latent part of the dream is quite clear as when he wakes up, he can recall that he had seen a treasure near the pyramids of Egypt. Apparently, he does not pay any heed to it, as there is no conflict whatsoever in his life at the moment and he seems to be quite content with it. But there comes a twist in the whole affair, as during the next few days, he happens to see the same dream repeatedly. He approaches a soothsayer for the interpretation of the dream, who tells him to abandon everything else and devote himself solely to the realization of this dream. He is still engulfed in doubts but when he meets the weird king on his course journey, he develops a firm belief in his dream. But after that, there is no smooth flowing for him as thieves snatch all of his possessions from him. But he never gets wavered by the adversities and obstacles on the way. He halts momentarily so that he could earn enough money for the trip to the pyramids; therefore he starts working with a glassware merchant. Soon he can earn money sufficient to bear travel expenses, and he accomplices a group of people who intend to proceed toward the pyramids in Egypt. Amongst his accomplices, is an English man, who has joined the caravan with the hope of meeting the extraordinary man, known to be the living Alchemist, infamous for transforming even an ordinary substance into gold. To avoid the tribal war, the caravan is compelled to halt for a brief moment in the desert. Santiago is fortunate enough to meet the celebrated man of the desert which further ignites in him the desire to fulfill his far-fetched dream. He is still missed by inches as misery strikes him again on pyramids as thieves loot him again and beat him nearly to death. He gets the prophecy in the dream again, as he is being told by the mysterious sound to go back to the old chapel in Spain, as the treasure is hidden there, he again starts on foot. As per Oglesby (2022) his novel has a message of hope. It preaches that one can achieve everything with the power of belief". The whole world seems to be helping Santiago, the very moment of gets a firm belief in his dream. The gypsy woman, the strange king, the alchemist, the Englishman, the glassware merchant, and even the dacoits help him interpret the omens, he encounters on his way toward the treasure in the pyramids. As per Coelho (1995), "the journey of transformation begins in our system when we no more resist the changes occurring around us". Santiago is the true model of this statement, as he is never wavered by the changes consequently happening around him. He is always seeking to look for the opportunity in every seemingly adverse situation. He has the nature to welcome change, rather he is somebody who gets fed up with monotony and that is evident when he leaves shepherding after mastering the art for three years. From the story, one comes to know that Santiago is somebody who honors his decisions and never backs off. He is ready to accept change and this is the shaping agent of his destiny. This mindset helps him to interpret the omens and seek the way ahead in the light of omens. This habit of welcoming the change helps him at every step of the story, as the readers

encounter the unexpected on every single leaf of the book. As per Buckmaster(2007), “the major problem in realizing our destinies is we, it’s not transforming oneself to be a new person, but allowing oneself to become, what he should always become to have a go on our dreams”. The protagonist of the story is eager to become the person, he was always destined to be, and he has no problem becoming the person destiny wants him to be. He never resists change, thus each and everything in the universe seems to be helping him in his cause. “We are empowered by the dreams in us, listen to your heart’s voice so that you can be empowered through the vigor of your dreams” (Deliso, 2001). The protagonist is completely submitting himself to the power of his dreams, enabling himself to seek the path, that destiny wants him to choose. As per Ramesh (1999), “it is nothing more than enticement and luring to experience dream at night, but the reveries enable us to immediately wake up and make them true.” The twist in the story, starts with the reverie of Santiago, the important thing is that he just does not let it go, but simply follows the pathway of his day time dream. As per Wright (1993), ‘if one is unable to realize his true self he feels a chasm the same way one feels empty of nourishment he experiences starvation’. This sense of void and chasm compels Santiago to be different from his dad and not to pursue studies to become a God-man. His sheep empower him with a true kind of emotional intelligence to have enough amount of tolerance and to have a true sense of exploration. Shepherding no longer challenges him; therefore he sells all of his sheep to have enough money to bear the expenses of his life transformation journey. The story may seem surreal and overladen with magical realism, but there is something very common and practical in it, and that is how one should enable himself to experience self-realization. According to Hopley (2003), “the author has a gifted ability to fuse the extraordinary with the ordinary things in life, making them look true to life.”

1.2 Methodology

Close Reading is a technique used to closely study a text for inferences to a particular theme. The layers of meaning are disclosed through this technique. One who employs this technique can read between the lines of the text as well as he can decipher the meaning of the meaning. This elucidation enables a person to see a sorted-out theme within the paraphernalia of the author’s particular approach to the text.

1.3 Self Realization

“The true wealth one can find is to know about himself and to know what lies inside it”(Coelho, 1995). It is worth knowing anything else in life. Self-doubt and being restless with the moment ignite a desire to seek something more substantial and more sustaining. But to start with, one needs to break the norms of ordinary day-to-day life and develop a sense of self-exploration. According to Coelho (1995), “the burning desire to know oneself deciphers for a person more codes of the mysteries of life like the whole world as well as something to know about the creator himself”. Merriam-Webster Dictionary has defined ego and self-realization in almost similar patterns. According to Webster(1990) “how a person values himself is all about his ego”.

This definition appears to be a coin with two different sides, aligning together again to find something more similar that is the true power lies in knowing about one’s self. The other side is that one will only know about himself when he will keep the thing on top, the thing that

matters most to him, in comparison with the things that matter less to him. Webster (1990) furthermore probes, “Ego” on psychoanalytic and purely philosophical layers of the meanings of the word, in every sense possible. As per the psychoanalytic theory, the Ego is to be precise a bridge between a man’s known and unknown world. It is more of a journey from idealism to being practical. This is that particular part of the personality that connects a man’s inner and outer world with the desire to accomplish goals in the light of society as well as the inner world of a person. Self-discovery has been a pert word amongst the thinking minds of the world, since time immemorial. According to Leela(1998), “knowing about your ego is just like igniting a flame of self-knowledge in the otherwise dark tunnel of self”. The man remains literally in darkness without self-knowledge. Or he remains blind throughout life if he is unable to seek light through self-realization. Once one can realize his true potential through knowing himself, he then becomes able to see everything else, necessary to be known in this universe. Every adversity is diminished, once one can find a course for himself (Richard R. , 1999). “This must never be taught to destroy one’s ego. Rather I should suggest that one should try his level best to locate, probe, and investigate his ego if he means something substantial in the world”.

According to Hesse (1922), “doesn’t be an adversary to your ego, if you are so, you will always be deprived of the otherwise pile of self-discovery”. He proves that a man’s ego may be the reflection of his personality if it still exists on a surface; it is still to be studied, observed, and measured. It does not matter how ordinary it may appear, one should make it its true guide by accepting and then studying to find more meanings in the layers of self.

According to Richard (2001), “don’t place yourself as a rival to your true self, go deep inside it and find your true essence”. This is what Santiago does, by connecting to his inner self, he can find means to accessing his true self.

1.4 Paradox of Self-Realization

When one is able to achieve self-discovery, he can find God within himself. This is something worth knowing and something to be placed as one’s true achievement. As per Sarkar(2013), “once I have been having a communion with a guru, we came to this conclusion that the crux of our souls consist of every experience that we had to-date”. Every journey, especially the journey towards self-realization is the sum of all the experiences one has in life. Nothing goes in vain, everything contributes to it. It is very much pertinent to note, that the experiences that Santiago has during his quest for a treasure hunt, no matter how bad or good they may be; every single experience help him further in his pursuit. He masters the art of interpreting the omens. This provides him the idea to connect with the soul of the world, thus the whole experience is a collaboration between him and the rest of the world, each helping the other to achieve the hot pursuit at hand. So apparently it may be so that if one’s soul is achieving his heart’s desire, in reality, it is somehow achieving what remained unrequited and unaccomplished by the earlier souls. They all help him to achieve that goal, the goal that has been the goal of each soul, thus it becomes the paradox of self-realization when one’s journey is to self-realization and one can realize and have communion with the soul of the world.

1.5 Dreams are Destiny

The conflict in the tale of *The Alchemist* appears with Santiago having a single dream again and again. Apparently, he is quite satisfied with what is at his disposal at the moment. But he experiences strange unrest in his system; therefore, he fixes an appointment with a soothsayer, who ignites in him the spirit to follow his dreams. The meeting with the strange king further motivates his cause. He is now living his destiny through his dreams. During realizing his dream, he experiences so many hurdles and adversities. Yet he is determined to outsmart the circumstances. Strangely every single obstacle, he experiences makes him a staunch believer in the power of his dreams. He never loses his heart; he is never wavered by a single inch from his true resolve. Momentarily he may halt, but when he resumes, he comes up with more strength and vision to pursue his destiny in the light of his dream. He gives not much importance to this dream as he is quite content with how his life is going at the moment. But he gets agitated as he sees the same dream in the quick succession of a few days. He seeks a gypsy woman that interprets his dream and pledges him to proceed to Egypt for treasure as it is his destiny. Still, in doubt, he meets a mysterious king who further strengthens his belief in the quest for his dream. The tale has an allegorical significance too. It is simply a tale of material gain, but beneath the surface, it is something related to the search for the soul. The angelic part of the human being is obscured by the mundane activity of day-to-day life. Santiago can find his true treasure which is the meaning and message, written deep in his soul, through the power of his dream.

1.6 Conclusion

The work selected for this research is Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. The research shows how close reading enabled the researchers to study the theme of self-realization in the novel under study. We, human beings as deputy of the omnipotent, are confronted with two main riddles. The very basic riddle, we find ourselves entangled with, is the means to answer the basic query that our existence keeps on asking us and that is why have been we created. If we are worthy of something we must know that there is some purpose in our existence and we were not created without any reason. This thought enables a thinking soul to embark on a journey towards self-discovery and self-realization. This is the essence of The Alchemist saga. Santiago is confronted with these two questions and categorically proceeds in the desired direction. The textual analysis and the close reading of the text enabled researchers to seek out the execution plan for the protagonist, devised by the author Paulo Coelho. The numerous examples from the text can be quoted that how the journey of self-realization kicks off by simply heartburn, a sense of restlessness, or a desire to be unsatisfied with things, no matter how satisfying they may appear. As supported by the examples from the text, the researchers were able to dig out the embedded execution plan of the protagonist that enabled him to embark on a journey of his self-knowledge, something that is invaluable, something one may be proud of, something to be done, something to be achieved. While devising a plan for self-discovery, he develops something in three dimensions, the dimensions of the very world. He gets rid of everything else that may become an obstacle to his journey towards his goal. Then he believes in the power of his dream and the omens he counters during this life-enhancing experience. He is not worried about anything that may seem like an obstacle or a hurdle, he never wavered, and he keeps on pushing with every passing day with more faith and more insight. Once he can submit his will to his destiny by truly

following it by any means, he can transform himself as a vicegerent of God, by doing miracles, summoning winds and reading omens, and ultimately being able to achieve what he always desired. It is not the tale of one individual but Santiago is the echo of every thinking soul that is experiencing unrest with the things he experiences at the moment. With effort and constant thought, one can carve the niche, he desires and goals he truly wants to accomplish.

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