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ijmrset@gmail.com



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# A Critical Study of Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist'

Areesha Khan

B.A. (H)English, Semester 5, Batch 2021-2024, Amity School of Languages, Lucknow Campus, U.P. India

**ABSTRACT:** This project, “A Critical Study of Paulo Coelho’s “The Alchemist,”” examines the book’s various elements and provides a thorough understanding of its themes, characters, and symbols. The Alchemist tells the tale of a shepherd boy from the Andalusia region of Spain who longs to travel the globe. In order to chase his personal legend, he travelled from his home to far-flung markets in North Africa and then into the Egyptian Desert to reach the Pyramids. The major goal of this work is to analyse everything Santiago comes across along the way.

**KEYWORDS** - Alchemist , Tale , Shepherd , Andalusia , Spain , Travel , Globe , Personal legend , far - flung markets , North Africa , Egyptian Desert , Pyramids , Analyse , Santiago.

## I. INTRODUCTION OF AUTHOR

Paulo Coelho, was born in rio de Janeiro in 1947. His father was an engineer and mother was a housewife. From an early age, Coelho’s dream was to be a writer and attended a Jesuit school. According to Coelho, his parents sent him to a psychiatric facility. Young Coelho got in law school but left to travel around Europe, North Africa, and Latin America. He became a journalist and , founded the 2001 magazine, and then he worked as an actor and a director in a theatre company. Coelho encountered a man in one of the cafes in Amsterdam who advised him to travel to Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain as part of the customary Roman Catholic pilgrimage. This encounter marked a significant turning point in Coelho's life. In 1986, Coelho did this. He thus had a realisation that The Alchemist readers will be familiar with: He made the decision to pursue his ambition. Coelho had big plans to start writing. Coelho wrote The Alchemist the following year, which was published in 1988, but his first publisher dropped the book due to a weak initial sales performance. He discovered a bigger publishing business and wrote that garnered a lot of interest and rose at top of the international bestseller list. It is the book with the most translations, according to the Guinness World Records.

### The Alchemist: Plot

**Prologue-** The prologue delivers a narrative to the story, the fact that the Alchemist reads the book brought by someone in the caravan shadows the Journey undertaken by the central characters of the story. The Alchemist picked up the book which someone in caravan had bought and reads the story about the legend of narcissus, a youth who knelt every day beside the lake to admire his own beauty, one day he became so fascinated with it that he fell into the lake and drowned. In this version of the story, the goddess of the forest appeared in front of the lake and found the freshwater transformed into salty tears. She assumes that the lake weeps for Narcissus’s death because it could best contemplate his beauty. The lake replied that it didn’t know that Narcissus was beautiful and was crying because it could see the reflection of its own beauty in the depth of his eyes. An Andalusia shepherd child, Santiago, is the subject of this particular tale. He always dreams whenever he sleeps next to a sycamore tree in an abandoned church. He always has dreams where he was promised by a kid that he would soon discover a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids, Santiago interprets that dream as a message from heaven. He therefore sought out a fortune teller’s assistance to interpret his dream. Considering that his dream was a premonition, she advised him to visit the Egyptian Pyramids. After some time, he encounters Melchizedek, the enigmatic senior ruler of Salem. He demands, as if reading Santiago’s mind, that if Santiago sells his sheep, he can go to Egypt. He was informed of both good and bad omens by Melchizedek, who also gave him the Urim and Thummim stones to aid in understanding the omens. He is familiarised with the concept of a personal legend. You have always wanted to become in the author’s words “ your own legend”. Everyone is aware of their personal legend when they were young. As a result, Santiago sold his flock and sailed to Tangier. When he first arrives in Tangier, he was offered help from a stranger to take him to the Pyramids but that person steals all of his money instead. Due to this, he was left with no choice but to work there. Thus, he secures employment with a crystal retailer. He learned many things from the merchant, who in turn was inspired to take chances by him. He worked and now he had money and he chooses to carry on with his personal legend—to find the treasure. As a result, he joined a



caravan that was headed for Egypt. He come across an Englishman on his way. The man was going to meet a well-known alchemist while studying alchemy. The Englishman told him that the alchemy formula that is written on the stone is called the Emerald Tablet. He also informs him that the finest product of alchemy is Master Work. The Philosophers Stone, a solid, and the Elixir of Life, a liquid, make up the item. The ability that elixir of Life has is to cure all diseases, whereas the Philosopher's Stone is having the ability to transmute lead into gold. Al-Fayoum was where the caravan had to spend a long period. The caravan's leader orders the travelers to halt moving to cease the tribal fighting. Around this time, Santiago started dating Fatima. A young Arab woman, she was. Santiago notices one day, two hawks were indulged in a conflict in the desert while out for a walk. He thinks of it as a terrible omen since it suggests that an army is approaching the oasis. He informs the head of the tribe about this. He shields Al-Fayoum from the assaults. This idea is also told to the alchemist. As a result, he approaches him and proposes to travel together with him. He suggested him to proceed from Fatima and search for his personal legend. Fatima also teaches him to complete his tour so that she can propose to him. He was advised by the Alchemist that he should follow his heart while they are traveling. They are captivated by Arab troops as they travel to the Pyramids. All are given by the alchemist. With the use of the Philosopher's Stone, the alchemist turns into gold. He then goes towards the oasis, and told Santiago that he must endure on his own after giving him this gold. When he arrives at the Pyramids, he starts excavation but finds no gold. The criminals attack and rob him once more. He then tells them about his dream. One of the convicts replies that after hearing him, he had a similar dream. According to his dream, the wealth is concealed in an unrestricted Spanish church under a sycamore tree, he tells him. The location of Santiago's treasure is now known. He returns to Andalusia and begins to excavate beneath the tree. So, he discovers his treasure.

### **The Alchemist Themes**

#### **The importance of individual Legends**

The Alchemist entitlements that the only way to have a satisfying life is through one's personal legend. On his journey, he Met various people and comes through various obstacles such as fear, and Even his love for Fatima stopped him from pursuing his dream but the Learnings he gets from each people he met on his way made him move Ahead toward his dream. People such as Santiago's father and the crystal Merchant realize their personal legend but due to reasons such as poverty, And lack of motivation they aren't able to follow their personal legend Whereas people like Santiago come out of it and follow their dreams overall "it's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting" And that has made Santiago keep moving towards his goal. The story suggests that it's not merely about achieving your personal Legend it's more about the journey you go through to pursue your personal Legend, the obstacles, and circumstances you face develops you at each Stage, and the experiences you gain transform you for something better. The spiritual unity that was denoted by the soul of the whole World in the book The Alchemist unites all of Nature, from persons to desert sand. This specific idea is required to serve as the basis for the connection in the novel between Santiago's self-purification process and the alchemist's conversion of metal into gold. Novel asserts that whether it be Santiago or a bit of iron, the Soul of World has infiltrated everything with an unrestrained passion or Personal Legend. To realise its personal Legend, each thing must learn how to unite with the world's purging Soul. The outcome of that constant purging is perfection. This notion that everything, including metals, has a purpose Santiago is also seen exploiting What the book calls the "common language of the world" to interconnect with nature on numerous occasions. For example, contempt what aspects to be a lifeless desert, Santiago's horse illustrations signals of life. Anxiety has often mounted in the way of Santiago's achievement in apprehending his own legend through his journey. Santiago has countless uncertainties, including a childhood fear of having the gypsy woman construe his dreams, a financial fear of wandering to Tangier or linking the caravan in the desert and losing his money, a physical fear of dying in the battle at Al-Fayoum, a spiritual fear of waning to alter into the wind when the alchemist forces him to try, and a number of other fears. The authority of fear controls the feeblest characters in The Alchemist like to those who disrespect fear because they look like wise people. In precisely, the crystal merchant signifies a person whose life has been meticulous by terror. He wants to go to Mecca because it's obligatory, but he thinks that once he gets there, he won't have anything else to live for. He continues to feel extremely unsatisfied as a result, supporting the notion that fear acts as a deterrent. The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho discusses the problems that a generation that is emerging in a time of rapidly advancing technology and globalisation is facing. The narrative directly tackles the subjects of fear and control. It was released in the decade of the late 1980s, when global Cold War tensions were at their peak. During the war that was between the US and the USSR, significant advancements in military technology were made, and a nuclear exchange of fire was a real possibility. The major takeaway from Coelho's book is to not let fear influence one's decisions in life. The book also presents a compelling case for a person's capacity for self-determination. In a generation where many people have become paralysed by exposure to the suffering of the world on a global scale. The pilgrimage of Coelho on the Camino de Santiago, a path that brought people to a memorial dedicated to the apostle James in Northwestern Spain, served as an inspiration for the novel. It is simple to compare these excursions to quest of Santiago in the novel assumed that they both take place in Spain and underline the spiritual development that pilgrims



go through while travelling. Coelho's Catholic upbringing undoubtedly had an affect on how he perceived religion, but he does not only employ Christian terminology in his book; rather, he refers to a mystical force that unifies all of formation by utilising expressions like "The Soul of The World."

### **The Alchemist: Characters**

**Santiago** - Santiago is the main character in the Novel. Santiago, who was born and raised in a remote town called Andalusia. He is driven, ambitious, and interested to Discover everything there is to know about the world. As a result, he refused to follow his parents' wishes for becoming a priest and selected to work as a shepherd in order to fulfill his desire to know the world. The whole Story revolves around him that how he met different people and each people Played an important role in his journey. It's all about the experience and Knowledge he gained and the things he learned. He gains important lessons From several characters along the route. Santiago is a smart child who, because of his open mind, is especially well-suited to discovering his Personal Legend. He also places a high value on freedom, which is why he chose to become a shepherd and why he is wary of getting involved in activities that can endanger it. In the end, he understands that staying safe frequently poses a greater risk to his freedom than taking a chance.

**Melchizedek** - Salem is a mystery far-off land, and Melchizedek is its ruler. Santiago sees Melchizedek in Tarifa's town plaza, where he first informs Santiago about everything. Even if they are unaware of it, the king always manifests to those who are attempting to live their Personal Legend. Although he initially looks to be wearing a typical Arab outfit, he eventually peels back his cloak to expose a gold breastplate covered in valuable stones. The magical stones Urim and Thummim are also given to Santiago.

**Englishman** - The Englishman and Santiago meet as they travel to Al-Fayoum. The englishman , who aspires to be a great alchemist, is going to learn from a renowned alchemist who is said to be over 200 years old and capable of transforming any metal into gold. He offers Santiago his own books as they cross the desert, teaches Santiago a lot about alchemy.

**Fatima** - She was a gorgeous girl who lives in the Al-Fayoum oasis. At the well there, Santiago fell in love with her. After speaking every day for a few weeks, he finally proposes to Fatima. But before they get married, Fatima demands that he look for his Personal Legend. Santiago finds this puzzling, but the Alchemist reminds him that real love never interferes with one's Personal Legend.

**The Alchemist** - A tremendously influential alchemist who resides in Egypt's Al-Fayoum oasis. At first, Santiago learns about him via the Englishman, but in the end, Santiago makes it clear that he is the Alchemist's real pupil.

**The Shopkeeper** - Provides Santiago with employment after he is robbed in Tangier. As a result of accepting the work at the crystal shop, Santiago has gained a lot of insight into the owner's outlook on life and the value of having dreams. The shopkeeper is a genuinely compassionate man who understands Santiago's goal – perhaps even better than Santiago himself – despite his overall aversion to taking chances. It is the situation where he tells Santiago that returning to Spain is not in his future and so he will not do so.

### **SYMBOLS**

**The Desert** - The desert serves as The Alchemist's initial symbol. The story's main theme is overcoming challenges, and Coelho uses the metaphor of crossing a hostile desert to demonstrate how strength in the face of challenges is essential for pursuing one's calling. Given that it is the setting for transformation and the establishment of a relationship with the divine spirit. The desert appears to be hard and merciless, but when the youngster learns to look closely, communicate with the surrounding nature, and speak the language of the heavenly spirit, he realises that there is life all around him and that this life will lead him to his treasure.

**Crystal merchant Shop** - The Tangier crystal merchant's shop is the following symbol. The concrete manifestation of the merchant's stagnation in life is this store. The shop's disrepair and neglect reveal the merchant's complacency and lack of drive. The cracked crystal also represents his loss of enthusiasm and hope. The business represents how people frequently become mired in routine and lose sight of their goals and aspirations.

**Egyptian pyramids** - Another key symbol in the book is the Egyptian pyramids. They stand in for the destination of Santiago's travel and a representation of the fortune he is looking for. The voyage to the pyramids is more essential than the treasure itself, even though the book's actual prize turns out to be something else than gold.



### The Alchemist as an Allegory

An Allegory is a kind of story that reveals a deeper, more profound meaning. The Alchemist is one such story. Allegories frequently teach a lesson or present a moral necessity. Allegories can be utilised in poetry, novels, short tales, and even visual art. In The Novel his journey from his native Andalusia exposes fundamental truths about life and self-discovery. His journey entails more than just a strenuous hike. It is a traditional illustration of a hero's journey, one that includes the hero's physical mobility and environmental changes in addition to his or her mental, intellectual, and spiritual growth. Thus, the protagonist journeys on both a spiritual and physical level. As a result, the protagonist makes both a spiritual and a physical journey, and as a result of the knowledge he has acquired along the route, he comes home changed. The surviving non-living objects utilised in the book have significant meaning that the reader can interpret in their own way. The Alchemist, as a metaphor, thus offers a profound understanding of everything around us and the journey one takes in search of his or her own particular narrative.

### II. CONCLUSION

A parable about pursuing your dreams, The Alchemist is an allegorical work of fiction that attempts to introduce you to the various ideas you will come across in life, such as love and fear. All of it is about dreaming. And the treasures we look for elsewhere but discover at our door. Overall, it's a timeless tale about the necessity of succeeding our aspirations and hearing to our hearts. Through this journey, the value of the journey in achieving a goal is underlined.

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