

**Philosophical and Spiritual Insights in Paulo Coelho's The
*Alchemist and Brida***

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Abstract

Paulo Coelho's novels are an inspiration to many lives and he has been cited as an inspiration by many notable personalities. His novels can be categorized as an autobiography, allegory, paradox and religious novel. Coelho's works are more philosophical and spiritual in nature. Paulo Coelho, in his novels *The Alchemist* and *Brida* speaks about the general philosophy of life and spirituality. The novel *The Alchemist* revolves around a shepherd boy and his quest for a treasure that appears in his dream. *Brida* is a novel about a young Irish girl. The novel depicts the journey of the twenty one year old female protagonist. The story is about the discovery of her purpose in life. The protagonists of both the novels search for the true meaning of life. The search for destiny, quest for identity, love, self-realization, soul mate, religious and spiritual themes are common in his novels. The characters of the novel make them realize the philosophies, wisdom, knowledge and God.

Keywords: Philosophy of life and spirituality, search for destiny, soul mate.

Philosophical and Spiritual Insights in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and *Brida*

Paulo Coelho as an optimist writer and master story-teller directs his readers through philosophy, mystery and spirituality. His novels highlight a story which stresses the importance of universal values. Coelho's work emphasizes on the protagonist's journey to discover the meaning of their life and existence. He incorporates his own life experiences in his writings. The characters want to transform their life into a better one. Coelho's characters explore the treasure within them and from outside.

Paulo Coelho de Souza is a Brazilian writer, thinker and lyricist. He is one of the world's most popular spiritual writers. He is known for employing symbols to depict spirituality in his works. He was born into a religious family. His parents strictly brought up him in the traditional path and Catholicism. He had an intense thirst for literature from his childhood. It made his parents to send their boy to the mental asylum. His writing career started as he went on a pilgrimage. His novels contain moral, philosophical, universal and spiritual messages. He does not believe in any particular religion. The writer believes that all the religions in the world preach the same knowledge and light.

Coelho inspires his readers through his messages to the world. His writings bring out the spiritual enlightenment. According to him, religion is a path for discipline and collective worship. He trusts that everything is the formation of one thing only. His important philosophy of life to every human being is live every moment fully. His ideas are reflected in each and every novel. The existentialism and spiritualism becomes the central part of his novels. The fictional writer is a campaigner for peace and social justice. He projects the art of living life through his protagonists. As a post-modernist writer, he uses words and other elements from various texts and contexts. He uses the Bible and the Koran to mention about

the greatness of God. The words like hookah, maktub and hajj from the Arabic language is used.

The Alchemist is the signature novel of Paulo Coelho. It brought popularity and fame to the author worldwide. It made a Guinness World Record for highly sold and the most translated novel by a living author. The novel is written in metamorphic and poetic language. It transforms and inspires its readers. The author arrests his readers with his flamboyant imagination. The novel is the blend of realism and fantasy.

The novel is divided into two parts. The first part takes place in Spain. In the second part, the protagonist's journey continues from Tangier to Egypt. The story is about a shepherd boy from the Spanish province of Andalusia. He likes to travel. So, he chooses to be a shepherd. Like Coelho, he is also born into a devout religious family. Against his family's wish to become a priest, he desires to travel the world.

The boy has a frequent dream in which a child appears and calls him to the Pyramids in Egypt. He pursues his dream and destiny with the help of the other characters in the novel. A gypsy woman helps him in interpreting the dreams. She tells that his treasure is in Egypt. The other day, he meets a man named Melchizedek. He was the King of Salem. Santiago sells his sheep and moves towards his hidden treasure.

The protagonist is deceived by a robber in Tangier, Africa. He works for a crystal merchant and develops his business. After a year of earning in the crystal shop, he continues his journey towards Egypt. The shepherd boy moves to an oasis along with a caravan. He is accompanied by an Englishman, who is in search of an alchemist. He explains the process of alchemy, Philosopher's stone and the Elixir of life. The caravan reaches the oasis and rests there because of the tribal war in the desert. In the oasis, Santiago sees a vision of war. He warns the elders and chieftains of the oasis of the upcoming war. He is appointed as a

counselor after the vision comes true. The boy finds his love in the desert. Her name is Fatima, a woman of the desert. Santiago is prepared to settle in the island with Fatima. She encourages him to move on with his dream.

Santiago meets the alchemist in the oasis. The old man helps him to cross the desert and teaches him to listen to the heart. The boy learns the process of alchemy and secrets of life from the alchemist. They are captivated by the tribal men. The alchemist tells Santiago can turn himself into wind. At last, with the help of the desert, the wind, the sun and the almighty, he arouses the storm.

Both the men travelled to a monastery and the alchemist gives him a piece of gold. The boy bids farewell to the alchemist. Santiago reaches the Pyramids and digs in a particular place. He finds nothing. Later, he is beaten up by some men for money. He tells them that he is looking for a treasure. A man in the group says his dream of seeing a treasure in the abandoned church in Spain. The boy travels again to Spain and finds the treasure. He shows his gratefulness to God and goes to meet his love.

Brida is the third novel which tells the story of a twenty-one year old girl. Brida is from Ireland. The novel focuses on the life and character of Brida. The book starts with the girl's interest of learning magic and ends in a note of success. The novel takes place in Dublin. It follows the journey of the girl.

Brida wants to learn magic. She approaches a wizard in a forest. His name is the Magus. He is the teacher of the Tradition of the Sun. He agrees to teach Brida as he recognizes a Gift hidden in her. His first lesson is Dark Night. He makes her to stay alone in the forest for a whole night. He wants Brida to overcome her fear. He finds Brida as his Soulmate. She learns Dark Night from the Magus.

With the help of a bookshop owner, she gets the contact of Wicca. Wicca is the teacher of the Tradition of the Moon. She identifies Brida as a witch and her Gift. She teaches her some rituals through tarot cards and some practices. She makes her disciple to visit her previous incarnation. She is the perfect teacher of Brida and leads her to make her own voyage of journey.

Brida has a lover and his name is Lorens. He is a science student who does not believe in magic and mystery. But he helps Brida to achieve in her spiritual journey. Wicca teaches the girl to dance to the tune of the world. She helps her to awaken the voices. She tells Brida about Soulmate. The concept of Soulmate will help to understand the Tradition of the Moon. Brida can identify her Soulmate by seeing the light in the eyes of the other half.

Brida meets Magus and understands more about identifying a Soulmate. A certain point of light above the shoulder of the person helps to recognize the Soulmate. Brida identifies the Magus as her Soulmate. As Brida practices all the rituals, Wicca allots the day of Spring Equinox for the ceremony of Initiation. Brida invites the Magus. The girl has confusions in selecting her Soulmate.

The Initiation day has arrived. Wicca invokes the Tradition of the Moon to accept the three ladies as witches. As rituals continued, Brida opens the eyes of her soul and sees Wicca's teacher. He gives the girl the power of a witch. The Magus accepts the law of nature and blesses the love of Brida. Brida accepts Lorens as her Soulmate. She discovers herself as a witch and succeeds in the path of magic.

Paulo Coelho, in his novels *The Alchemist* and *Brida* speaks about the general philosophy of life and spirituality. The protagonists of both the novels search for the true meaning of life. The search for destiny, quest for identity, love, self-realization, soul mate,

religious and spiritual themes are common in his novels. The characters of the novel make them realize the philosophies, wisdom, knowledge and God.

In *The Alchemist*, an old man named Melchizedek, advises Santiago to listen to his heart and the universal signs and omens. The journey, to attain the treasure, teaches him the life and gives different experiences. Santiago learns many things through his experience. The author promotes the audacity of believing in one's dream. In *Brida*, the teachers the Magus and Wicca make her to overcome her weakness. Along with the traditions, they teach life's lessons for the readers.

The boy is in search of his Personal Legend. He discovers the Soul and Language of the World. *Brida* is in her journey of discovering herself. Every character conveys philosophy and secrets of life in both the novels. The protagonists have many dilemmas in pursuing their dream. They get guidance from different characters. The characters struggle to achieve their dream as they have many obstacles in his path. The boy travels many places and meets different kinds of people. The boy and *Brida* travel through the ordinary and extraordinary world. Santiago understands that his travel is not easy as he thought.

The life of alchemist seems extraordinary. The novel transforms the life of people who regret their failures like the alchemist turns the base metals into gold. The travel in the desert teaches him the art of observing the world. The novelist conveys the message that everything in the world is one and acts according to the law of nature. The things in the world are emerged out of the same soul. The author reflects his ideas through his characters. They hope God has written everything including their destiny. He pacifies the readers not to be afraid of unknown because everything was already written.

Paulo Coelho advocates that the denial of one's dream is the rejection to follow his destiny. The human beings are the creation of God, who has given dream to pursue our

destiny. The purpose of our life is to discover and realize the destiny. The book uses numerous words of wisdom and philosophies from the past. It encloses Indian and western philosophies. The philosophy which is spoken in the novels is necessary for the modern society. People remain selfish and forget about their tradition and culture. Coelho reminds the people about dreams, love, joy, courage, destiny, adventure and divinity.

Love is the force which changes the world with its power. It enriches the Soul of the World. He teaches the elements of nature about the meaning of love. The theme of love is celebrated in both the novels. Brida talks about reincarnations, Soulmate and other magical elements. Love is portrayed as a source of pure joy. It interconnects everything in the world. The journey of Brida is to learn magic and find her Soulmate. She has confusions in pursuing her path of magic and seeking her Soulmate. As Santiago meets his love, he plans to give up his dream. The love gives them hope and faith to travel in the path of destiny.

The Soul of the World is given importance. The author believes that every animate and inanimate thing has soul. The soul is common to everything and the purpose of human being is the union with the ultimate soul. The quest of the main characters starts with a dilemma and acquires spirituality. The characters realize their own ability, potential and power. Brida learns magic and becomes a witch. On the other hand, Santiago realizes that his soul is the manifestation of God Himself.

Many religious and biblical messages are used to represent the Supreme Being. The path of the protagonists is to seek the true knowledge. Santiago and Brida attains spiritual enlightenment in their voyage of self-realization. Coelho's novels bring out the spirituality shown in the mask of existential dilemmas of the protagonists. He tells universal truth using dreams and symbols. He includes the life of Jesus Christ and his sufferings for his fellow human beings on the earth.

The traditions and rituals described in the novel signify the involvement and the perfect knowledge of the writer. Brida and Santiago has the vision of their own life and destiny. The images of spirits, angels, demons, Voices and Guardian angel symbolize the supernatural elements. Through his central characters, Coelho deduces that there is only one God. The people of the world interpret religion and the rules of their religion to commune with God. But Coelho says that there is an unwritten universal language to communicate.

In *The Alchemist*, Coelho displays various religions and their beliefs. He views that all the religions in the world tend to point to the same wisdom, knowledge and light. His novels give positivity, religious ideas and acceptance to its readers. Coelho's novels explore the spiritual quest for ultimate meaning of life and existence. The novels tell the message of hope and faith and the characters have different identity.

The crucial themes of the novels are self-realization and accomplishment of dream with the help of nature and actions. To fulfill their vision, the people travel different places. The author's belief is that "when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it" (Coelho 21). Coelho has the optimistic view towards the world and people.

The author gives an image of the people that everyone is ready to complain and criticize the life of others. But they are not ready to change their own. The writer says that human beings are responsible for happiness and sadness of their lives. As Santiago's life gives him variety of possibilities, there are opportunities for human beings in their life which could be utilized properly to make their life meaningful.

People believe in the fate and lack the belief of their own potentiality. It is the universal lie which prevents people from achieving success and their own Personal Legend. Coelho wants his readers to be courageous to follow their dream. He shows a path to follow in life. He says that each person is unique and different from one another. In *Brida*, he infers

that life is an act of faith. Brida spend a night alone in the forest to learn Dark Night. She learns that the search for God and believing in the next moment of life is called as faith.

The leading characters of these two novels have chosen the path of difficulties and obstacles. They clear their way with the help of hope, courage and faith. According to Coelho, spirituality is the quest for the consciousness of his self and listening to the heart and mind. The novel is filled with spiritual themes and symbols. The central character follows the omens, signs and his personal instinct.

The biblical message of Adam and Eve and the man is the manifestation and creation of God. The things that is possible for God is possible for His children too. He says that the life of the people transforms and become united with the almighty. The Pagan and Wiccan religious forms and beliefs are used.

The Alchemist is high in philosophy and *Brida* is a tale of spirituality. The Philosophy runs throughout the novel. The term Anima mundi refers to the soul. The concept defines that there is a fundamental connection between all living things on the earth. The author believes that our souls are of made up of our ancestors' soul. The soul could divide into many souls as cells and plants do. The Soulmate is the concept of identifying our other half.

The Soul of the World is the common term used in both the novels. Everything that happens in the earth is the desire of the Soul of the World. The Soul of the World creates a personal legend for every living and non-living thing. It interconnects and controls the universe. It has a language of the world which helps to communicate with all things. The personal legend gives meaning to a person's life and its existence. The philosophy of Personal Legend is related to the Indian concept of Advaita Vedanta. It is a passage to spiritual realization.

In *The Alchemist*, Santiago follows the personal legend and in *Brida*, the protagonist seeks her Soulmate. Both of them make a journey to discover their destiny. The novels reflect the greater universal truths. Pantheism and Platonic idealism are seen in Coelho's works. The philosophy of existentialism is seen through the character of Santiago.

Coelho paints a different picture in *Brida*. The girl is on a journey to rediscover herself and her Gift. She wants to be a witch and learns magic to realize herself. The rituals of the witch were the part of Christian Tradition. In the traditions, sexual intercourse is seen as communicating with God. The witches and wizards travel through time and see the visible and invisible world. In *The Alchemist*, the characters communicate with the Soul of the World. They possess wisdom, power and Gift. The author interprets the scene from the Genesis about the mistakes done by Adam and Eve. "God knew what he was doing when he drew their attention to the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If he hadn't wanted them to eat it, he would never have mentioned it" (253).

The author motivates the readers to attain success in their life. He corresponds with the proverb; Failure is the stepping stone to success, in the novel. He says failure, disappointment, mistakes and disillusion are the tools of success. Both the novels represent adventure and self-mastery. *Brida* has inborn capability which helps her become a witch. The journey of *Brida* can be called as the wanderings of a gifted woman, spiritual enlightenment and a true path.

Coelho offers the philosophical and spiritual account of journey of his character's quest for self discovery. The teachers of *Brida*, the Magus and Wicca teach her the wisdom and knowledge of nature and the mysteries of the Tradition of the Sun and Moon. The novelist tells the life's lessons, when we desire from the bottom of our heart and follow the right path, the whole world will help us to make it happen.

The secret of success is listening to our hearts. In *The Alchemist*, the protagonist finds his treasure where the heart says, “That’s where I am, and that’s where your treasure is” (153). The alchemist in the novel suggests that understanding the life is like a voyage. He teaches Santiago the art of listening to his own heart. The transformation and change are the critical elements in the philosophy of life. To achieve success, one should come out of their comfort zone. Through the alchemist, Coelho exemplifies the need for the individuals to transform their lives. The people should not bind themselves to their ordinary life.

Paulo Coelho teaches the meaning of life and the way of living the life through his characters. Brida learned about Dark Night, her previous incarnation and magic but she was in a state of confusion. In her previous life, she feared pain, loss and separation. She takes risks, follows different paths and gives up others. People could not make a choice without feeling any fear. She has to choose a path. But she wants to choose all possible paths, so that she might not regret the choices Brida made. The mentality of Brida is same as the ordinary people. The individuals do not follow a particular path. They prefer all those paths which are comfortable for them.

Brida has a peculiar gift within herself. The philosophy in Brida’s success and achievement is she has power to choose her own path and decisions. She does not follow the path of ordinary people. She chooses the extraordinary to reveal her gift and destiny. The central character prefers the spiritual path. The story tells the life of a real woman who was met by the author at certain point of his life.

Wicca’s instructions make Brida’s journey successful. The word Wicca is used for the representation of Christian beliefs and practices. The teacher follows the Tradition of the Moon and Wiccan religion. The characters in the novel are real persons. The novel is the mixture of religious, spirituality, philosophy, psychology and magic.

Brida is a journey through time and space to discover the forgotten Gift. The novel has the feminine elements as the central characters are women. Brida's journey is similar to Coelho's spiritual journey and pilgrimage. Her constant search and thirst for wisdom and knowledge make her realize herself and discover her destiny.

The characters of his novels pay heed to omens, dreams, vision, myths, signs and symbols during their journey. The philosophy of alchemy tells the art of personal transformation. Like Santiago, the human beings are capable of realizing their potential and ability. The decision-making is a tool which leads Santiago to find out his treasure. The novelist believes that love is the greatest secret of success, which has the power of transforming a person into a better one. The character of Santiago transforms himself from being a shepherd to a wise man.

Paulo Coelho sees the modern world and its plight. He writes his novels as a message to the millions of people out in the world. His novels have optimistic messages for his readers. Coelho says that fear of failure is the barrier to success and happiness.

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