

Existential psychology in Paulo Coelho's Novel *The Alchemist* with Special Reference to the Alchemy

Author: Mrs.S.Kavitha, Ph.d Research Scholar, Reg.No 10672, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,
Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli,

Email: kaviprabuindia@gmail.com

Guide: Dr.P.BalaShunmuga Devi, Associate Professor of English, Dept.of English,
A.P.C Mahalakshmi College of Arts & Science Thoothukudi.

Abstract

Existential Psychology emphasizes the awareness of an individual of his own being and the outside world. Existentialists believe every human being has the freedom to choose their own path and they are solely responsible for their whole actions. The protagonist Santiago in the novel, *The Alchemist* realises the existence of his soul within him and merges with the entire consciousness of the whole cosmos. Santiago undertakes a journey to discover his personal legend. On his journey he meets the Englishman who is in search of his personal legend. The Alchemists are men who work with the fire in the laboratories. By heating metals, they could experience the real state of the world which understands the universal language of the world. This process of the alchemy converts lead into gold. This symbolises the transmutation of the lower energies to a state of higher consciousness. Each and every individual is evolving from the elementary essence to the superhuman consciousness. Thereby Santiago, in accordance to the existential theory evolves to be the nobler self of an Alchemist through awareness, experiencing his own grandeur and achieves harmony with the universe.

Key words: Existentialism-*The Alchemist*-alchemy-process-transmutation-oneness.

Existential psychology deals with the individual's encounters in life, both physical and psychological which lead to their transition in life that may be at times be life changing that leads the individual to emerge, evolve and become a different individual. In simpler terms, existentialism deals with the awareness of his/her own being. It also deals with the questions, who am I? where do I come from? And so. "Human beings are responsible for their own plans and destinies." (Sharf 166). Similarly, Santiago the most important protagonist of the novel *The Alchemist* conveys, "I learned the alchemist's secrets in my travels. I have inside me the winds, the deserts, the oceans, the stars, and everything created in the universe." (*The Alchemist* 146). Similarly, Master ChoaKok Sui conveys, the moment they identify with Parabrahman, they realize that Parabrahman or purusha is everywhere, it is also in your body. There is only oneness, so in a state of illumination, you say I am the body, I am the chair, I am the wind, the tree and the mountain. (82).

The theory of existentialism, Paulo Coelho and Master Choakok Sui emphasises the realisation of their evolution and how they are connected with the whole universe. The existentialism theory creates the

awareness of one's own self. Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* also brings out the similar traits of oneness of his soul with the wind, sky, earth, mountains, trees, and the entire cosmos. Therefore, this paper presents the Existential Psychology in Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* with special reference to the alchemy.

The novel *The Alchemist* speaks about Santiago's journey to discover his personal legend. Santiago meets the most significant character the Englishman in his journey. His journey is in pursuit of the alchemist who understands the universal language. The alchemists are usually presented to be immortal. They possess the knowledge to tackle every situation in life. Even when the snakes attack the venom of the snake does not cause any harm to the alchemist. The alchemists spend much of their life time in the laboratories for purifying the metals. They sit beside the fire and give up the pleasures in the world. They discover the truth that fire has a cleaning effect and by purifying the metals they purify their body, emotions, and their mind. "They believed that, if a metal were heated for many years, it would be the Soul of the World. This Soul of the World allowed them to understand anything on the face of the earth, because it was the language which all things communicated. They called that discovery the Master Work-it was part liquid and part solid." (80).

This chemical process is done in the lab using apparatus of various kinds. They include the crucible, the hermetically sealed vessel and many others. The heat symbolizes the burning of the negative energies in the body and mind. This burning of the negatives is done through tapas, sadhana and prana. This procedure of heating the vessels or purifying the mind and body is done very carefully in a very slow manner. This heating should not cause any harm to the vessel or the person who does the sadhana. Heat should be induced with moderation. Inducing heat to the chemical in the vessel is interpreted as heating the body. As a result, the vibration rate of the structures in the body and the mind awakens the prana. This awakening of the prana is not purifying morally but it creates an actual growth in the metabolic rate gradually. Therefore, the alchemy discovers the experience of the psychophysiological state.

This transformation or the cleansing of the individual is symbolised through the philosopher's stone. 'The Philosopher's Stone' has a fascinating property. A small silver of the stone can transform large quantities of metal into gold." (*The Alchemist* 81). Similarly, Master ChoaKok Sui interprets, "the mengmein chakra has the power to transmute lower, grosser energies into spiritual energy (69). The impure gross metals like lead change into pure, golden energy. It is also interpreted that the lower aspects of anger, hatred, jealousy anxiety is changed to peace, love, generosity, mercy, forgiveness, accurate perception, correct expression, honesty, industriousness, one-pointedness and harmony. The physical body and the emotional body should be cleansed thoroughly before performing the alchemy or the transformation of the lower energies to higher. It may also lead to psychological imbalances which causes madness, depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. Thereby the physical body is also diseased and it may lead to life style disorders like diabetes, hypertension, spondylitis and so on. Therefore, the impure physical body, emotions, mind and the spirit should be purified before changing lead into gold or converting physical consciousness into divine consciousness.

The purification of the mind can be done through certain meditative techniques. The mind is often disturbed, unbalanced, and it is not clear. It has much of confused and submerged mental impressions. The suppressions of the emotions in the subconscious mind brings pain, and sorrow in life. A happy and healthy personality

respects the mind and silently observes the actions and thoughts of the mind whether it is good or evil. Self-awareness and self-control are the first step towards purification. Seeing the mind and accepting its reactions weakens the negative thoughts and emotions. Then it is exhausted easily. This purification helps much in transformation or alchemy. The technique of pranayama helps in changing the alchemy of human character. Through the inhalation and exhalation of breath the submerged thoughts and emotions rise to the conscious mind from the inner realms of the subconscious mind and it gets exploded. Therefore, the “Alchemy is a serious discipline.” (*The Alchemist* 81). Swami Satyananda Saraswathi conveys, “alchemy is couched in a myriad of symbolic terms representing the stages one goes through on the meditative path. (317).

The alchemists have the tendency to control their self and work with the various forces in the human body. The four elements, which include the physical body, emotional body, mental body and the spirit unite together and form three principles. Sulphur, salt and mercury are the three principles which forms the Ida and the Pingala or the male and the female. Union of the Ida and Pingala awakens the Sushumna. Sushumna is the higher consciousness which awakens only if the physical body, emotional body the mental body and the spirit is in a very purified state and the aspirant should be in a curious strive for eternal ecstasy and goodwill. At this juncture the divine elixir is produced by the fire which dissolves and rebinds the earth, water and air. Harmony of the mental body, emotional body, and physical body with the personality induces the secretion of the sweet elixir, the immortal nectar of life. Santiago learns, “the liquid part of the Master Work was called the Elixir of Life, and that it cured all illnesses: it also kept the alchemist from growing old. And the solid part was called the Philosopher’s Stone.” (*The Alchemist* 81).

Therefore, each and every being in this universe is evolving to reach this harmonious state the ‘Philosopher’s Stone’. “Everyone will search for his treasure, find it and then want to be better than he was in his former life. Lead will play its role until the world has no further need for lead: and then lead will have to turn itself into gold.” (150). Similarly, the psychologist conveys, “life is one contingency after another, with no guarantees beyond the certainty of death. This is by no means a comfortable state, but it is necessary to our becoming human. What is needed is the willingness to risk a leap of faith in making choices. Becoming human is a *project* and our task is not so much to discover who we are to *create* ourselves.” (Corey 135).

Therefore, the goal of the Alchemy is to reach and attain the philosopher’s stone. The alchemy or the transformation from the physical life to the sacred holy life takes much time and numerous life spans. In the evolution process the elementary essence which is a portion of the divine spark comes down in the form of subtle energy for evolution. It attracts all the negative lower energies and becomes grosser. This gross energy is necessary for building the etheric body. Then this elementary essence after building its etheric body emerges into the mineral kingdom. At this stage the etheric body as well as a small portion of the emotional body develops. Then it emerges into the vegetable kingdom where the emotional body receives consciousness to a certain extent. After the development in the vegetable kingdom it enters into the animal kingdom. In the animal kingdom the etheric body develops drastically and the emotional body develops. The lower natures of anger hatred, jealousy and the higher nature of love intelligence and power also blossoms. After the evolution

of the animal kingdom emerges the advent of the great human kingdom which is adorned with great respect and reverence.

Human form is considered sacred and the various deities portrayed in the human form represents the divinity within a human being. At this stage, the human being understands to transmuted or transcend his lower emotions of self-centeredness into divine love, divine light and divine power. After this phase, the superhuman stage is acquired where the mental body develops to a great extent and starts emerging into the causal body of light. Human beings transform into great divine beings through service to god and his fellowmen. Incarnation after incarnation man evolves from the elementary essence to that of the higher consciousness only, "if we release ourselves by giving free rein to our will to power, we will tap our potentiality for creativity and originality." (Corey 135). Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore delivers,

Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my father,
Let my country awake.

Tagore's poem explains when the mind is courageous without any thought of fear and when knowledge is free the gateways of freedom open and awakens his country. Likewise, Santiago emancipates himself. His will power governs freely and initiates his creativity and originality, which makes him experience existentialism. Santiago explores his existentialism as, "I learned that the world has a soul and that soul can also understand the language of things." (*The Alchemist* 81).

Thereby "existentialists assert that a human being is "thrown into" into a concrete, inveterate universe that cannot be "thought away" and therefore existence ("being in the world") precedes consciousness, and is the ultimate reality." Existentialism-By Branch / Doctrine-The Basics of Philosophy.

Similarly, Wordsworth in his poem *Tintern Abbey* also experiences everything inside his soul and conveys,

And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of
Man,

Similarly, it is rightly explained in *The Existence of God is Self-Evident* as, "Within spiritual oneness exists individuality. Within Individuality exists spiritual oneness. These paradoxical truths coexist simultaneously. Imagine there are one million computers. Each computer is an individual computer but when connected and gridded together, they function as One Megacomputer." (Kok Sui 60).

The existential psychology, Hudson, Wordsworth, Master Choa Kok Sui, and the novel *The Alchemist* portray man is free to create his own life. They convey the ultimate aim of a human being is to experience the existence of the soul within him, which is one with the entire consciousness of the Cosmos. Santiago with great effort, courage and freedom understands this alchemy of the soul. Santiago evolves to the nobler self of an alchemist through awareness, experiencing his own grandeur and achieves harmony with the Universe.

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