

# The Concept of Dreams, Exploration and Expedition in the development of Identity in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*

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**Abstract**— *The research paper is written on Paulo Coelho's novel The Alchemist which describes the expeditions of a young Andalusian shepherd, named Santiago who after having a recurring dream of a treasure, travels to Egypt. The journey is symbolic of the metamorphoses of the young shepherd's life, whose personality develops with each expedition, exploration and experience and he becomes the true Alchemist. Santiago's simplicity, innocence, struggles, his capability to adapt to the situation, and to look beyond the obstacles of life sets a new pattern of survival which unravels his true identity to himself and to the readers towards the end of the story. The paper is concerned with the study of the exploration and development of Santiago's identity through his exhaustive expeditions.*

**Index Terms**— *Alchemist, Dream, Expedition, Exploration, Identity*

## INTRODUCTION

*The Alchemist* (Portuguese: O Alquimista), is an allegorical novel which has been written by the famous Brazilian author Paulo Coelho and was published in the year 1988 (in English: 1993). It has been translated into 70 languages and is the contemporary version of the story 'The Man Who Became Rich Through a Dream' – *1001 Nights* (1645) written by Arne Thompson Uther. The novel has also been praised as a self-help novel which explores the effects of Narcissism and the real path to finding spiritual enlightenment, and presents new research prospective in the field of socio-psychological study.

The present research paper focuses upon the study of the exploration and development of the protagonist's (Santiago) identity through his exhaustive expeditions in order to find the meaning of his recurring dreams. The research paper uses the dream-analytical theories of Sigmund Freud (2013) and Carl Gustav Jung (1989) in order to show the co-relation between dreams, destiny and self-evaluation.

But before a detailed discussion upon the research topic in hand the concepts of Identity and the dream-analytical theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung has been explained. The meaning of the term Identity is 'The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality; or the qualities, beliefs, etc., that makes a particular person or group different from others', and the relevance of the term in the novel is that the complete story revolves around the protagonist discovering his individual identity which allegorically stands for being the alchemist: a person who is capable of changing ordinary metal into gold.

The dream-analytical theory of Sigmund Freud (1900) considers dreams to be the royal road to the unconscious as it is in dreams that the ego's defenses are lowered so that some of the repressed material comes through to awareness, albeit in distorted form. Dreams perform important functions for the unconscious mind and serve as valuable clues to how the unconscious mind operates. Thus, Freud interpreted this dream as wish-fulfillment. The same can be said for the dreams of the protagonist which can be interpreted as his unconscious desires for adventure, treasure and finding love.

The dream theory of Jung (1989) considered that the dreams reveal more than they conceal, as they are a natural expression of our imagination and use the most straightforward language at our disposal: mythic narratives/archetype, which act as a medium to reach out to our potential capabilities or desires or dreams in order to attain balance or self-satisfaction or self-realization, namely, individualization.

## DISCUSSION

### DREAMS AS REAGENT TO DESTINY:

Coelho starts the novel with a bizarre dream of an Andalusian boy named Santiago (who is quite content with life of a shepherd), who while resting near a sycamore tree in the sacristy of an abandoned church, dreams about a child telling him of a hidden treasure near the Egyptian pyramids. The protagonist's anxiety and curiosity forces him to visit an old woman gypsy who interprets his dream as being prophetic and instructs him to follow it. The gypsy's prediction puts him on a spot to decide between: his comfortable life with his two hundred sheep, his new found love for a beautiful girl (the daughter of a rich sheep merchant), and his journey towards his mysterious treasure.

And this is my interpretation: you must go to the Pyramids in Egypt. I have never heard of them, but, if it was a child who showed them to you, they exist. There you will find a treasure that will make you a rich man.

*The Alchemist*, pg. 14

Here Coelho's use of dream can be compared with Freud's interpretation of dreams being an unconscious stimulus to know ones desires, thus, in the novel the protagonist's stagnated life and his desire to marry the merchant's daughter must have forced him unconsciously to think about adventure and the treasure; and accordingly, to Jungian dream theories of the Archetypes depicting different mythic narratives, the various aspects of the dream can be interpreted as follows: the dream being an exact replica of Moses meeting a child in a dream like in the Holy Bible, the child being the image of the Holy Spirit or Angel showing the hero the path to enlightenment of soul, the Pyramids being the gargantuan goal/final destination to be reached by the hero to discover his own identity, the treasure being the higher purpose in life, and the journey being the path of expedition, exploration, transformation to achieve greatness. Thus, stimulus forces the protagonist to come out of his comfort-zone, face destiny and achieve greatness.

## EXPEDITION AND EXPLORATION: FACTORS TO THE DISCOVERY OF IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY

## Meeting the King of Salem: Guide and Motivator:

As Coelho puts his protagonist, Santiago, on his expedition to find glory, Santiago starts to gain new experience with every person he meets and every place he explores. First he meets a mysterious old man, Melchizedek, or the King of Salem, who acknowledges his dream and provides him with information regarding the good and bad omens. He also persuades Santiago to go on the journey to find his Personal Legend, and gifts him Urim and Thummim (two stones to read omens).

"It's the book that says the same thing almost all the other books in the world say," continued the old man... "It describes people's inability to choose their own destinies"... "It's this: that at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what's happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That's the world's greatest lie."

*The Alchemist*, pg. 17

"...whoever you are, or whatever it is that you do, when you really want something, it's because that desire originated in the soul of the universe. It's your mission on earth."

*The Alchemist*, pg. 20-21

"Never stop dreaming," the old King had said. "Follow the omens."

*The Alchemist*, pg. 59

## Meeting the thief: Mirror to reality:

Following Melchizedek's advice the protagonist sells his flock and purchases a boat ticket to Tangier (Northern Africa), but unfortunately, his meeting with a friendly stranger puts him into deep waters, as Santiago gets robbed off all his money and asset by the stranger. Hence, the protagonist meets the second person in his expedition who teaches him a lesson about being gullible and the harsh reality of life, and he is forced to self-evaluate and learn an important lesson about trusting others and himself, which is Coelho's introduction to the development and formation of identity of the protagonist.

## Meeting the crystal Merchant: Gain confidence:

Coelho also introduces other aspects of the personality required for survival, namely: optimism, trust in oneself, dedication, and adaptability. As Santiago after a great deliberation on his situation thinks rationally and optimistically, and decides to find a way to make enough money to return home, and as fate would have it, he starts working in the shop of a crystal merchant (as a glass and crystal cleaner), thus, he meets the third person on his expedition whose company gives Santiago encouragement, know about his positive traits, and the zeal to survive. As his dedicated work brings a lot of customers to the shop which pleases his employer and who in return acknowledges Santiago of being his lucky charm and persuades him to stay back (promises him a handsome salary) for a few more months. During his further stay, Santiago makes further improvements to the shop using various marketing strategies, like: the showcase outside the shop and to serve tea in a crystal cup, and is able to earn more money. But after eleven months, Santiago who had understood and evaluated the completely stagnated life of the shop owner (who had given up on his dream to visit the Mecca and had never dared to travel) decides to leave his comfortable life and proceed further on his journey, and ends up joining a caravan traveling to Egypt.

## Meeting the Englishman 'The disciple of Alchemy' and the Caravan drivers 'Hermits of the Desert':

Coelho puts his protagonist on an expedition through the desert, and thus, Santiago meets the fourth person who would elevate and open up his mind to the academics, facts and reasons of the world, and introduces him to the term Alchemy and the existence of the pyramids, which motivates Santiago even further to search for his treasure. As, Santiago during his journey to Al-Fayoum with the caravan meets an Englishman who was obsessed with learning the secret of alchemy (to turn any metal into gold) from a famous alchemist who lived near the pyramids at an oasis. But even with all their differences in their mindset towards the true nature of knowledge, they become good friends. Here Coelho represents the Englishman as the stagnated reader whose overview of the world is bookish, logical and far from reality, and the protagonist as a child in the wilderness slowly learning the trades of the world. Coelho also elaborates upon the growth of perception of the travelling protagonist as he starts to listen, interpret and understand the desert and the Soul of the World through his adaptability, open-mindedness and friendly behavior. Thus, Santiago meets the fifth company on his expedition, as journeying with the caravan, Santiago befriends the guide and the camel drivers accompanying the travelers, and he comes to know of their experiences in life, their optimistic mindset and their concept of living in the present, which motivates him even more to achieve his goal, as they represented the lives of hermits: being happy, optimistic, self-content, and believers of God and fate.

"We are afraid of losing what we have, whether it's our life or our possessions or our property. But this fear evaporates when we understand that our life stories and the history of the world were written by the same hand."

*The Alchemist*, pg. 73

## Meeting the Clan-Leader: Belief in Magic, essence of the desert and destiny:

Coelho introduces the protagonist to a new situation and his novel takes a new turn, as Santiago, meets the sixth person, the Clan-leader, in his expedition to find treasure and encounters a precarious situation which he faces bravely and gains more confidence in his own knowledge of the desert and belief in his dreams and destiny. As Santiago, towards the end of the journey to Al-Fayoum (an oasis) gets introduced as a wizard by the Englishman to the tribe council, and Santiago, even though nervous knowing the severity of the situation, is able to prove his power of wizardry by teleporting himself from one hill to another by using his skills of interpretation and prediction of the sand-storms of the desert.

## Meeting Fatima: Realization of love, sacrifice and destiny:

Coelho puts more complications in the life and expedition of the protagonist as he meets his eighth companion, Fatima, with whom he falls in love, and finally, understands sacrifice, unconditional love and the importance of finding the treasure. As Santiago's instant success as a wizard gets him accepted as a respectable guest and member of the clan by the tribe's leader who acknowledges him as a blessing from the gods (just in time to favour them in their recent warfare). Again fate knocks on the door and Santiago is prevented by the caravan leader to travel during the continuance of a tribal war. Thus, during his stay at the oasis he falls in love with an Arabian girl named Fatima, and the

relationship persuades to rethink his future plans of finding the treasure, but Fatima comes to his rescue and motivates him to move ahead and to fulfill his dream of finding the treasure and attain self-content rather than living an unsatisfactory life with her, without the realization of his dream of finding the treasure.

Meeting the Alchemist: Realization of the limitation of human thought:

Coelho further persuades his protagonist to realize the limitations to the human belief and thought, separating common-man from the spiritualist, as he encounters his ninth companion, the alchemist of the oasis (searched by the Englishman). As Santiago to find peace and clarity of mind regarding his future decisions wanders off into the dreary desert and confronts another omen, as he sees two hawks fighting in the sky. He interprets the incident as an attack on the oasis by another army which would lead to war. Out of concern for the people living in the oasis, he shares the interpretation of his vision with the tribal chieftain (according to whom attacking an oasis was a violation of the rules of the desert), and averts the war and saves many innocent lives. Being proclaimed a hero, Santiago journeys ahead with a heavy heart (of leaving Fatima behind) and confronts a black-garbed, veiled stranger (the alchemist of the oasis) with a sword riding his white horse through the desert, who eventually, offers to accompany Santiago in his journey through the desert till he would reach the alchemist sanctuary.

But as they were travelling through the desert both the men confronted another danger, as they mistakenly entered an area of intense tribal warfare, and were captured and called for interrogation, but were released by the soldiers because the soldiers fail to understand their crazy yet truthful confessions of the stranger being an alchemist and the protagonist being a treasure-seeker. Hence, Coelho introduces another factor pertaining to human thought which is limited and deters from possibilities and change.

Reaching the sanctuary of the Alchemist: Understanding Alchemy:

Coelho's motivated protagonist reaches the alchemist sanctuary near the end of the novel and learns the meaning of true Alchemy and being an alchemist which is to redeem all temptations of the world. Thus, Coelho persuades the protagonist to continue with his journey and to find his treasure.

Meeting the Bandits: Realizing the real meaning of his dream:

Coelho persuades the protagonist to reach the Great Pyramids, the final destination of his journey, where he finally comes to understand the significance of his dream, expedition and exploration. As Santiago, after a tiring journey through the desert, finally, reaches the site of the Egyptian pyramids and starts digging, but he suddenly finds himself surrounded by robbers who beat him and rob him of all his assets. But fate again smiles upon Santiago, as he comes to know of the robber's dream of a buried treasure in the sacristy of an abandoned church. Hence, Santiago finally, understands the true interpretation of his dream and returns to Andalusia where he finds his treasure buried in the church under the same tree where he had had the strange dream.

Thus, Coelho's introduction of the dream to put the protagonist on an expedition was to: explore and discover various hardships and glories of the world, to expand his own perspective, to become mature and open-minded, to know his own capabilities, and to attain self-contentment.

"The alchemists spent years in their laboratories, observing the fire that purified the metals. They spent so much time close to the fire that gradually they gave up the vanities of the world. They discovered that the purification of the metals had led to a purification of themselves."

*The Alchemist*, pg. 77

I don't live in either my past or my future. I'm interested only in the present. If you can concentrate always on the present, you'll be a happy man. Life will be a party for you, a grand festival, because life is the moment we're living now.

- *The Alchemist*, pg. 81

Conclusion:

According to Coelho, Santiago is the alchemist (spiritualist) searching for the secret of the art of alchemy (Spirituality, balance and self-satisfaction); the purification process of the metal in fire can be compared with Santiago's exploration and expedition through the dreary desert, and the final residual of alchemy, the gold (pure metal) can be compared to Santiago's self-contented heart and soul being his treasure, at the end of the story. Hence, Coelho expresses the true concept of alchemy, through the experiences of the character Santiago who travels throughout a continent in order to discover the greatest treasure, which was his own identity as an individual and also to discover the disadvantages of narcissism. Thus, the alchemist is an individual who looks beyond worldly treasures and searches for the true treasure in nature and within himself, but in order to achieve that he has to let go of all worldly temptations. Hence, the whole voyage was Coelho's way to describe to his readers the true path to the salvation of the soul and to discover one's unique identity and purpose, which is to live a simple, happy and spiritual life of a pilgrim.

Hence, the research paper collaborates all the basic theories of Freud and Jung related to dream-analysis in order to show the co-relation between dreams, destiny, self-evaluation, and formation of individuality and identity through the expedition of the protagonist, Santiago.

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