

## **The Importance of Food and Drink in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist***

**S. Suganya, Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr. B. J. Geetha**

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian writer whose thoughts are optimistic about the human existence in this world. Paulo Coelho discloses the comfortable life of human beings and his many novels are full of adventures as well as successful optimistic thinking of the human existence. His novel *The Alchemist* is a reflection of his thinking. Santiago, the protagonist in the novel travels for a long distance in search of his treasure.

Food is a basic need for each and every human being. In the beginning of the novel Coelho, explains about the shepherd and sheep relationship, and it reveals about the intimacy binding both of them. Coelho says that the sheep knew the schedule and it knew their schedule. They both spend a lot of time to get food and water. "It was as if some mysterious energy bound his life to that of the sheep, with whom he had spent the past two years, leading them through the countryside in search of food and water." (Coelho 4)

Coelho compares the life of a sheep and man. He says that the only things needed for a sheep are food and water. Likewise the boy also needs food and water. He understood what their main needs were. As far as he was able to lead them to the best pastures, they would be his friends. They were content with just food and water.

The only things that concerned the sheep were food and water. As long as they knew how to find the best pastures in Andalusia, they would be his friends. Yes, their days were all the same, with the seemingly endless hours between sunrise and dusk; and they had never read a book in their young lives and didn't understand when the boy told them about the sights of the cities. They were content with just food and water, and, in exchange, they generously gave of their wool, their company, and—once in a while—their meat. (Coelho 6)

Santiago was disappointed about the dream, so he went to the market to get something to eat. He bought wine to drink. Then he found a bench in the plaza and he tasted the new wine. Coelho points out that the day is very hot, and the wine will be a refresher. After drinking the wine the boy felt refreshed. He started to read the book he bought. He finally concentrated on the book which he was reading. Coelho emphasizes that when the boy had a bad dream, he felt angry and he refreshed his mind, with the wine. Coelho insists that food and water are the basic needs for the boy and the sheep. He pointed out the difficulties they have undergone in their lives to fulfill their needs.

Coelho portrays the aroma of food and he explains the story while concentrating on the drops of oil on the spoon. When the boy meets a saintly man, he found the most delicious food in that part of the world on a table covered with platters. The boy is unable to taste the food, but he learns that the secret of happiness is to see all the marvels of the world and never to forget the drops of oil on the spoon. Once again, the boy was in the market is surrounded by the aroma of strange foods and by the wanderings of the people. At last he understood that he should never forget about his sheep and all they wanted was food and water.

Rather than finding a saintly man, though, our hero, on entering the main room of the castle, saw a hive of activity: tradesmen came and went, people were conversing in the corners, a small orchestra was playing soft music, and there was a table covered with platters of the most delicious food in that part of the world. (Coelho 29)

Coelho says that the boy had no longer to seek out food and water for the sheep. He can freely go in search of his treasure. The boy decided that he would be as much as an adventurer as the ones he had admired in books. So he walked slowly through the market. The merchants were assembling their stalls and the boy helped a candy seller. The candy seller had a smile on his face and he is ready to begin his day's work as he is aware about his life. The candy seller offered the boy the first sweet he had made for the day. The boy thanked him for the candy and for learning a lot of new things, "When the stall was assembled, the candy seller offered the boy the first sweet he had made for the day. The boy thanked him, ate it, and went on his way" (Coelho 41).

Coelho beautifully brings out the generosity of a crystal merchant. Even though they do not know each other, the Crystal merchant allows Santiago to clean his crystal glassware. He tells Santiago that actually he does not need to clean the crystal to get some food because he does it because Koran requires him to do so. Coelho says that the Koran requires all Muslims to feed a hungry person.

The men who climbed the hill were tired when they reached the top. They saw the crystal shop that offered refreshing mint tea. The crystal merchant lets Santiago to sell tea in crystal glasses. The guests were impressed by the beauty of the glassware. Coelho points out that the man who visited the shop says that tea is always more delicious when it is served in crystals because it retains the aroma. The news spread, and many people began to climb the hill to visit the shop. The crystal merchant started to import enormous quantities of tea, along with the crystals. Men and women with the thirst for new things and visited his shop. Coelho vividly pointed out the helping tendency and hard-working of Santiago and he insisted that one should work hard for getting food and water, "The men climbed the hill, and they were tired when they reached the top. But there they saw a crystal shop that offered refreshing mint tea. They went in to drink the tea, which was served in beautiful crystal glasses" (Coelho 56).

Abraham Harold Maslow was an American Psychologist. Abraham Harold Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Human Needs is classified into five subsidiary sets of need. The needs are

=====

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

**Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneha Sri**

**Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019**

**The Importance of Food and Drink in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist***

**S. Suganya, Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr. B. J. Geetha**

Physiological Needs, Safety Needs, Love; and Belongingness Need, Esteem Needs, and Self-Actualization. Santiago in *The Alchemist* has the needs which must be fulfilled in his life. Santiago's physiological need was not a piece of a cake, in fact he faces hurdle in pleasing his Physiological Needs. This can be reflected from the novel that how he accomplishes his physiological need of hunger, drink, and sleep. In the novel, Santiago gets his meal from the market that he went as a shepherd to satisfy his hunger. "He went to the market for something to eat, he traded his book for one that was thicker, and he found a bench in the plaza where he could sample the new wine he had bought" (Coelho 14). From the explanation above, it is clearly visible that Santiago can accomplish his physiological need as stated by Maslow. Therefore, physiological needs of Santiago are fulfilled.

Maslow explains that:

The basic needs arrange themselves in a fairly definite hierarchy on the basis of the principle of relative potency. Thus the safety need is stronger than the love need because it dominates the organism in various demonstrable ways when both needs are frustrated. In this sense, the physiological needs (which are themselves ordered in a sub-hierarchy) are stronger than the safety needs, which are stronger than the love needs, which in turn are stronger than the esteem needs, which are strong than those idiosyncratic needs we have called the need for self-actualization. (Maslow 56)

Maslow explains that basic needs are what human really want. As a support to his theory, Boeree explains it in his journal as:

For example, if you are hungry and thirsty, you will tend to try to take care of the thirst first. After all, you can do without food for weeks, but you can only do without water for a couple of days! Thirst is the "stronger" need than hunger. Likewise, if you are very very thirsty, but someone has put a choke hold on you and you can't breathe, which is more important? The need to breathe, of course. On the other hand, sex is less powerful than any of these. Let's face it; you won't die if you don't get it! (Boeree2006).

Food images are often used to characterize people and their levels of status in the society. Thus food and drink play an important role in the novel. The novelist often makes eating and drinking as an important and significant activity, something that is not only used to achieve realism, but also to emphasize the action of the story.

---

---

### Works Cited

1. Coelho, Paulo. *The Alchemist*. London: Harper Collins, 2018. Print.
2. Maslow, A.H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-96.

S. Suganya  
Ph.D. Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Periyar University, Salem  
[suyan.suji@gmail.com](mailto:suyan.suji@gmail.com)

Dr. B. J. Geetha  
Asst. Prof. of English  
Periyar University, Salem  
[geetprem05@gmail.com](mailto:geetprem05@gmail.com)