

Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* -- An Exploration of Individual Psychological Dimension

Archana Kumari, Research Scholar

University Department of English

Ranchi University, Ranchi

akarchana00@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore individual psychological dimension into Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. *The Alchemist* is a mesmerizing fable about Santiago's journey to find his own personal legend. Discovering Personal legend is reflection of Santiago's striving for success. In the story, a Santiago has a quest to find his own Personal Legend. Santiago's personal legend refers to purpose of his journey which is represented by finding treasure in pyramid. The process of discovering personal legend can be analyzed with the help of individual psychological approach by Alfred Adler.

Keywords: Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, personal legends, individual psychology, spiritual journey, quest

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian author. When Coelho was 38 years old, he had a spiritual awakening in Spain and wrote about it in his first book, *The Pilgrimage*. It was his second book, *The Alchemist*, which made him famous. He has sold 35 million copies and now writes about one book every two years.

Coelho was born on August 24, 1947, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Coelho attended Jesuit schools and was raised by devout Catholic parents. He determined early on that he wanted to be a writer but was discouraged by his parents, who saw no future in that profession in Brazil. Coelho's rebellious adolescence spurred his parents to commit him to a mental asylum three times, starting when he was 17. "I have forgiven," Coelho said.

"It happens with love, all the time - when you have this love towards someone else, but you want this person to change, to be like you. And then love can be very destructive."

Coelho eventually got out of institutional care and enrolled in law school, but dropped out to indulge in the "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" of hippie life in the 1970s. He wrote song lyrics for Brazilian musicians protesting the country's military rule. He was jailed three times for his political activism and subjected to torture in prison.

After drifting among several professions, Coelho changed his life's course while on a visit to Spain in 1986 at the age of 39. Coelho walked more than 500 miles along the

Road to Santiago de Compostela, a site of Catholic pilgrimage. The walk and the spiritual awakening he experienced inspired him to write *The Pilgrimage*, an autobiographical account of the trek, in his native Portuguese. He quit his other jobs and devoted himself full-time to the craft of writing. In 1987, Coelho wrote a new book, *The Alchemist*, over the course of one two-week spurt of creativity. The allegorical novel was about an Andalusian shepherd boy who follows a mystical trek in which he learns to speak the "Language of the World" and thus receives his heart's desire. The book attracted little attention at first, until a French-language translation suddenly leapt onto bestseller lists in France in the early 1990s. New translations followed, and soon *The Alchemist* became a worldwide phenomenon. The book has sold, by Coelho's count, roughly 35 million copies, and is now the most translated book in the world by any living author.

<https://www.biography.com/writer/paulo-coelho>

The Alchemist is a spellbinding novel considered as masterpiece. It is a story of a shepherd boy named Santiago who pursues his drive for finding hidden treasures that he visualizes in his dream. He undertook adventurous journey to realize his dream, through this adventurous journey he comes across a wide variety of people and places, faces different sorts of hazards, explores the significance of love and most remarkably, discovers the true meaning of life on top of getting hold of the treasures he had been questing for.

Theory of Individual Psychology by Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler was born on February 7, 1870 in a suburb of Vienna. Adler and the other nine members founded The Society for Individual Psychology in 1912. He examined the personality around the same time as Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. His most famous works is *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* (1923). Adler's theory is known as individual personality theories.

The theory can be used to express the basic motivations that drive other motivations. His theory of the six key concepts in personality "can reveal the reasons and effects of why people do things." Adler has a tendency to change his theory of personality throughout his life but he ultimately believes that people focus on maintaining control over their lives." He believes in a "boost" or motivates the power behind our behavior, claiming that our desire to fulfill our potential becomes closer and closer to our ideals." Adler makes awareness a center of personality." Man is a conscious being; he is usually aware of the reasons for his behavior. He is aware of his inferiority and is aware of the goals he is striving for. Moreover, he is a self-conscious individual who is able to plan and guide his actions with full awareness of his meaning for his own realization (Lindzey and Hall 1957: 118).

Alfred Adler postulates a single "drive" or motivational force behind all our behaviors and experiences." By the time his theory has turned into his most mature form, he mentions that motivating forces force for superiority or perfection. It is our desire to fulfill our potential, to be closer and closer to our deal. While striving for superiority does refer to the desire to be better, it also contains the idea that we want to be better than others, rather than better in our own right.

“Adler studied various types of people and he came to the conclusion that there are four main types of people, “three out of four are negative. The powerful type tries to control others.” Getting types tend to be very passive and in line with other people's ideas, rarely inventive. Avoid types try to isolate themselves to avoid defeat.” They are usually very cold. The socially useful types, values that have control over their lives and strive to do good things for the sake of society.

There are six main concepts of personality theory according to Alfred Adler:

1. Fictional Finalism

Fictional finalism is a subjective experience rather than objective reality. It shapes the life course of an individual. Men’s supreme power lies in his motivation to move forward. A person cannot be understood without knowing the unique goal. Santiago initially does not understand his goal. He thinks that finding treasure is his only goal. As the time passes, he understands that finding treasure is just a part of whole experience that he gains throughout the journey.

The sale of his sheep had left him with enough money in his pouch, and the boy knew that in money there was magic; whoever has money is never really alone. Before long, maybe in just a few days, he would be at the Pyramids. An old man, with a breastplate of gold, wouldn't have lied just to acquire six sheep. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:18)

Initially it appears that Santiago’s fictional finalism is treasure and his passion for travelling and acquiring new experiences. However, his journey to find the treasure makes him spiritually profound person. There are two fictional finalisms reflected in the character of Santiago. The first fictional finalism reflected in this novel that Santiago wants to be a rich man; he looks for the treasure to gain wealth. Second, the knowledge he gains through his journey. He realizes that real treasure is not material gain rather the understanding of live, valuing relationships, happiness and spiritual awakening.

2. Inferiority Feeling and Compensations

Santiago has the feeling of inferiority. However, he has become a shepherd against the will of his father. He realizes that his life has got stuck at one point. He is not learning anything new in life. Some where he is going through identity crisis. He is not clear about the goals of his life. He has lost all the human touch in the company of the sheep. He wants to follow his passion for travelling, but he is bogged down by the responsibilities of sheep. He feels that there is something missing from his life. At one point he feels that he is also behaving like sheep. He is also leading a meaningless life, like sheep he has also lost trust in his instincts. He finds himself unable to make decision about his future.

The only things that concerned the sheep were food and water. As long as the boy 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. If I became a monster today, and decided to kill them, one by one, they would become aware only after most of the flock had been slaughtered, thought the boy. They trust me, and they've forgotten how to rely on their own instincts, because I lead them to nourishment. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:3)

3. Striving for Superiority or Success

a) Strife for Personal Superiority

Striving for superiority is one of the fundamental laws of human life, without it someone's life would be unthinkable. Striving for superiority is natural in all of us. In the beginning of the novel Santiago thinks that happiness comes from material gain or money. Thus, he strives for money for a better life. He wants to become rich to gain happiness and social prestige. One fine night he dreams about treasure in Egypt. He wishes to realize his dream. He seeks help from various people to know the truth about his recurring dream. He gets the oracle about his dream. He seeks the help of king of Salem to know about his treasure.

Superior feeling of Santiago is he felt could make extraordinary achievement than other boys. But his heart was speaking of other things. With pride, it told the story of a shepherd who had left his flock to follow a dream he had on two different occasions. It told of destiny, and of the many men who had wandered in search of distant lands or beautiful women, confronting the people of their times with their preconceived notions. It spoke of journeys, discoveries, books, and change. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:85)

b) Strife for Success

Santiago in his effort to be superior learns so many things. He learns the language of universe. Universal language is a language without words; it is understood by all the creatures.

However, this universal language can only be understood by someone who pays attention to nature. It is deepest call of our soul. It can only be understood by someone who turns his attention inward. Pulling out our attention from outside to inside is a huge task, only spiritual person can accomplish this. Santiago realizes that he has started understanding universal language. Santiago's strife for success develops his understanding about soul of the world. Understanding soul of the world becomes an important aspect in his successful and spiritual journey.

The boy took out Urim and Thummim from his bag. He had used the two stones only once, one morning when he was at a marketplace. His life and his path had always provided him with enough omens. He placed Urim and Thummim in the chest. They were also a part of his new treasure, because they were a reminder of the old king, whom he would never see again. It's true; life really is generous to those who pursue their destiny, the boy thought. Then he remembered that he had to get to Tarifa so he could give one-tenth of his treasure to the Gypsy woman, as he had promised. Those Gypsies are really smart, he thought. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:88)

4. Social Interest

Santiago on his journey to find the treasure meets number of people, who helps him to find the treasure. He looks for the people who can help him finding the treasure in Egypt. He joins the caravan that can help him to go to Egypt. On his journey he meets the alchemist, who helps him finding his personal legend. His life turns when he gets the chance to meet Melchizedek, who helps him understand the soul of the world. He also learns from the crystal merchant about the value of life and beauty of patience. When he meets Fatimah, the desert girl, the first time experiences the true meaning of love. Fatimah teaches him about detachment and sacrifice. King of Salem teaches him about the power of instinct and omens.

It's true; life really is generous to those who pursue their destiny, the boy thought. Then he remembered that he had to get to Tarifa so he could give one tenth of his treasure to the Gypsy woman, as he had promised. Those Gypsies are really smart, he thought. Maybe it was because they moved around so much. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:88)

Santiago keeps his promise of giving back on tenth of his treasure to the Gypsy woman. It shows he is a promise keeper.

5. Style of Life

Santiago is passionate about travelling; he wishes to explore the world. He does not wish to confine by social conventions. He listens to his heart and follows it. He goes against his father's will to become a shepherd. He enjoys the company of sheep. After attaining freedom from his family and becoming a shepherd, he becomes passionate about becoming a rich man. He has the courage to follow his dream. He undertakes the journey to find the journey and through this journey he gets the chance to meet various people, he learns from them and understands the soul of universe. He is the man of words; he keeps his promise and helps others as well.

The boy knew a lot of people in the city. That was what made traveling appeal to him— he always made new friends, and he didn't need to spend all of his time with them. When someone sees the same people every day, as had happened with him at the seminary, they wind up becoming a part of that person's life. And then they want the person to change. If someone isn't what others want them to be, the others become angry. Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:8)

6. Creative Power of the Self

Santiago is the man of courage; his heart seeks adventure and new experiences. He has the courage to follow his dreams. He does not believe in conventional thinking; his idea of life is different than others. He chooses to become a shepherd rather than a priest. He learns the mystical aspect about life. With the help of his courage and persistence he gains the supreme knowledge. He does not only find the treasure but also understands the universal language - a language with no words only feelings. He also develops the insights to see the soul of the world. His courage, passion and persistence make him not only a rich person but also a man of wisdom.

The horizon was tinged with red, and suddenly the sun appeared. The boy thought back to that conversation with his father and felt happy; he had already seen many castles and met many women (but none the equal of the one who awaited him several days hence). He owned a jacket, a book that he could trade for another and a flock of sheep. But, most important, he was able every day to live out his dream. If he were to tire of the Andalusia fields, he could sell his sheep and go to sea. By the time he had had enough of the sea, he would already have known other cities, other women, and other chances to be happy. I couldn't have found God in the seminary, he thought, as he looked at the sunrise. (*The Alchemist*, 2004:5)

He learns to trust his instincts and see through the moment. He develops his attention so much that he can actually understand what message Mother Nature wishes to convey him. His courage, curiosity, readiness to learn takes him long way than any ordinary shepherd could ever think of.

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Archana Kumari, Research Scholar
University Department of English
Ranchi University, Ranchi
akarchana00@gmail.com