

RESEARCH ARTICLE

FATIMA AS THE ALCHEMIST IN PAULO COELHO'S 'THE ALCHEMIST'

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Abstract:

Alchemist, the term is widely known as the person who transmutes metals into pure gold. On the surface level, Paul Coelho's international bestseller 'The Alchemist' has the alchemist as a character himself. In real sense, he is a practitioner of alchemy and in depth he also acts as a life guide to Santiago across the desert. Connotatively, alchemist is that one person in everyone's life who transmutes individuals into better beings. He/she plays a paramount part in achieving one's destiny, thereby aiding to follow our personal legend. In traditional interpretation, this work of art has the alchemist who inspires Santiago right before travelling to the pyramids in search of treasure. This paper aims to put forth a new interpretation by presenting Fatima, the female protagonist as the alchemist, by providing in depth analysis of the character Fatima as the alchemist in Santiago's life. Adding layers of interpretation to the term alchemist, this paper projects Fatima in a new light. Fatima's character is unveiled with huge reverence and dignity. This paper argues Fatima not just as a mere character in this fictional work, but as the driving force and pulse of the novel.

Keywords: Alchemist, catalyst, guide, personal legend, destiny.

Introduction:

Paul Coelho's *The Alchemist* was first published in the year 1988 in Portuguese tongue. In the very initial year of publication, Paul Coelho managed to sell only 900 copies. People around sensed the doom of the book. But, as Paul Coelho mentions in the Author's Note about receiving a letter from HarperCollins, an American publishing company, which said

"Reading *The Alchemist* was like getting up at dawn and seeing sun rise while the rest of the world still slept." This letter has paved the way for Paul Coelho's entry into World Classics. Having sold more than 30 million copies, this book incites and instigates the desire to follow personal legend. Readers are awestruck knowing the fact that this book was written in just two weeks but what remains backstage is that, Paul Coelho has penned his forty one years of life experience in two weeks.

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Santiago- Andalusia to Egypt

Paul Coelho's *The Alchemist*, has Santiago, a Shepherd boy from Andalusia as the central character. This work of fiction portrays Santiago's journey in finding the treasure at the pyramids, owing to his personal calling. Travelling from Andalusia across Tarifa to Egypt, Santiago's journey made him stronger than ever, by paying heed to the omens. Throughout journey, meeting different characters, made him realize his dream better. Right from the old woman in Tarifa, to the old king of Salem named Melchizedek who puts forth

“And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” (Coelho 21)

Later on Santiago meets the crystal merchant and exerts wisdom in improving crystal merchant's business. The old man points out to Santiago “you have been a real blessing to me. Today, I understand something I didn't see before: every blessing ignored becomes a curse. I don't want the miraculous maxim- anything else in life ...” (Coelho 55)

Next on path, Santiago meets the Englishman. With each of these characters, Santiago influences them and is in turn influenced in a positive manner. Now on scene arrives Fatima, the female protagonist; near the well at oasis. She is introduced as “Finally, a young woman approached who

was not dressed in black. She had a vessel on her shoulder, and her head was covered by a veil, but her face was uncovered.” (Coelho 88) Right at this moment Santiago experiences love. “Their meeting is the union of two souls – the divine marriage, ‘hieros gamos’.” (Meghnad 2017) Maktub (It is written).

Setting:

The place where Santiago meets Fatima has got history and importance attached to it. Santiago meets Fatima near a well and it is the same place where Jacob meets his future wife Rachael, at the well.

Fatima is the name of Prophet Muhammad's daughter. In Islamic tradition, Fatima is considered to be one of the four perfect women. And in *The Alchemist*, Fatima does justice to her name.

Fatima as Santiago's Alchemist

Accompanied by Santiago, the Englishman is on his path to achieve his legend i.e., meeting the alchemist. They both first try finding the alchemist, but end up being futile. Later they try asking a man and two women regarding the alchemist but none of them actually pay any serious heed and this is the time Santiago meets Fatima, the Woman of the Desert. She is the one to reveal the whereabouts of the alchemist. This unfolds the sense of wisdom on the part of Fatima, who is not like any other woman at the oasis but on with in depth knowledge.

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Fatima appears only in few countable pages, limited in speech and dialogue but plays a vital role. Unfurling Fatima, She is no ordinary woman. But the one manifesting selfless and unconditional love towards Santiago. She becomes the driving force for the fulfillment of Santiago's personal legend. When Santiago was almost stuck in his effort to find the treasure, when Santiago was on the verge of giving up his dream for his love, Fatima unlike other women pushed and motivated Santiago to pursue his destiny. She stresses on the importance of achieving destiny and she, being a believer of dreams, opines that she would wait for Santiago and he would definitely come back to her if she is a part of his dream. She stands as the epitome of love and a staunch believer of destiny.

Fatima- her personal legend:

Before conspired and destined to meet Santiago, Fatima didn't have any destiny as such. It was just daily chores that filled her life, but Santiago's arrival has made her life meaningful and anticipating Santiago's return, after achieving his personal legend has become her personal legend now. She is happy to wait for him, she is happy to wait for her courageous man to return.

Shift from oasis to desert:

Before meeting Santiago, Fatima's life was ordinary like any other woman. But the destined meet with Santiago, added colour to her life. Before, she was just a woman of oasis, looking at people and

pilgrims, but with Santiago and his departure in fulfillment of his personal legend, it's not the oasis that is important for her anymore but, the desert, as she waits hopefully for Santiago's return.

Love – a divine feeling:

It is strange to see that Fatima has got same feeling towards Santiago, as he had at the very first sight. That moment of love at first sight freezes the readers. Divine, instead a platonic love!

Love, not an obstacle:

In this novel, love is not portrayed as a hindrance, but as a further impetus, the catalyst behind one's journey to achieve personal legend. This is presented beautifully with Fatima and Santiago's relationship. Love is that force which keeps motivating Santiago to find his treasure and return to Fatima. Though initially Santiago was wavered in his decision to stay back with Fatima or to continue his journey, Santiago later on realizes his need to continue his journey, driven by Fatima's words

Fatima as a Mentor:

Since the time Santiago met Fatima and narrated his omens and destiny, Fatima guided Santiago against all the odds that developed in his heart. Fatima, even though it is hard for her too to leave Santiago, she convinces herself and convinces Santiago too to accomplish his dream.

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Fatima- woman of the desert, more of a woman:

Fatima, from the very beginning of her conversation with Santiago, stresses that she is Woman of the desert and is happy to wait for Santiago as he embarks his journey. A shift in her temperament takes place at their final adieu, when she mentions that might be a woman of the desert but above all, she is a woman, as she bids adieu with heartfelt tears. "I'm a woman of the desert," she said, averting her face. "But above all, I'm a woman." (Coelho 117)

Omens brought them together:

Santiago's omens about finding the treasure made him meet the old king, the crystal man and now Fatima. Fatima in her conversation with Santiago stresses that she also believes in omens which brought her to Santiago.

Conclusion:

Fatima did fair justice in being Santiago's alchemist, proven as Santiago emerges victorious in chasing his dream

.The last line of this masterpiece says: "I'm coming, Fatima," he said. (Coelho 161) But the sole imperfection in Fatima's role as an alchemist is despite the fact that Fatima was powerful enough to motivate Santiago, he couldn't resist thinking and going back to her. It's the alchemist who has put a check to Santiago's quandary. Alchemists are not only the ones who are seen in the deserts, constantly experimenting, but also the ones who guide us like a polestar; Fatima is one of that kind.

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