

Flora and fauna: Sources of Inner Amity and Harmony in Paulo Coelho's The Pilgrimage and The Alchemist

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Abstract

Nature has always been the main force behind the existence and survival of human life. Paulo Coelho, the widely acknowledged novelist and modern spiritual writer, has portrayed nature as nurturer extending power, strength and reason to make human life meaningful. Flora and fauna offer unconditional love and support to the protagonist (the writer himself) as and when he seeks them with complete devotion. Amalgamation of magical realism with numerous experiences makes the protagonist's outer and inner journey purposeful. In this novel the plants and animals, including birds, play the role of guide, protector and sometimes nurturer. The elements of the natural world enlighten the path of the seeker towards achieving his goal. Nature as a pathway leads man to attain wisdom and ultimately leads him to a harmonised life.

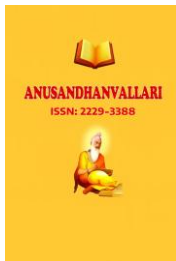
Keywords: nature, strength, flora and fauna, magical realism, guide, pathway, wisdom, harmonised life.

Introduction

Among the well renowned and widely acknowledged writers the name of Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho stands elevated due to his unique style of writing. His aura and fame as a modern spiritual writer is a well acquainted fact to all. In an interview with Brian Draper, Paulo admitted that at the very ripe age of forty he started his writing career, soon after travelling the road to Santiago in 1986 and as a result his first book titled *The Pilgrimage* came before the readers (Draper 1). After this book the writer didn't stop and penned his most famous novel *The Alchemist* (1987). His style of expression is admired by all the readers and the critics as well around the world. Before witnessing the experiences of both the protagonists of the selected novels, this becomes obvious to mention the impact of Boom Literature, as mentioned in the book *Literature of Latin America*, which brought a flood of multiple themes and expressions in the writings of the contemporary writers (Ocasio 90-98). Many writers, including Paulo, portrayed the human and natural world through the lens of magical realism. Magical realism brings out the best of the world of nature and Paulo himself. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Magical Realism is "a style of writing that mixes realistic events with fantasy" (Hornby 937). His technique of mixing real life experiences with dreamlike events seems unbelievably natural to the readers.

Flora and Fauna: Sources of inner harmony and reconciliation in *The Pilgrimage*

In *The Pilgrimage* the writer Paulo Coelho is the main protagonist himself. In 1986, his journey to the Road to Santiago-de-Compostela ascertained and aligned his life and he put forth this personal experience this transformative expedition in the form of this fiction. The pilgrimage is not just any casual or routine excursion, it is an extraordinary experience which transfigures an ordinary person into the great spiritual writer Paulo Coelho.



In the very beginning of the novel the author delineates the role of the spiritual master who has the calibre to interact with the elements of nature. The nature itself plays the role of a nurturer and a guide in this autobiographical fiction. Paulo has portrayed himself as “a warrior of the light” (Coelho xiii), the title used later in his philosophic handbook *Manual of the Warrior of Light*, who seeks for some supernatural powers to be conferred by his spiritual master. Unfortunately he fails to clear the test laid down for such warriors. He disqualifies to hold the magical sword and as a reconciliation, is sent on a long journey along the road to Santiago. These future warriors, which are called pilgrims in the book, are intentionally sent on such journey for self-actualisation and self-discovery. One unknown guide is provided to such pilgrims so that they could seek indispensable guidance as and when required. Many rituals, practices and exercises are performed by the pilgrims during the journey.

Paulo’s guide Petrus teaches him various exercises: the seed exercise, the Speed Exercise, The Messenger Ritual, the Water Exercise, the Blue Sphere exercise, the Burial Alive exercise, the RAM Breathing exercise, the Shadow exercise, the Listening exercise and many more. All these exercises and practices are unswervingly associated with the elements of nature like plants, mountains, water, sky, earth, air and light. The exercises unburden his mind and soul of all uncertainties. Basically, all the rituals, practices and exercises bring Paulo close to nature. Every time when he performs some exercise, he learns something new and reconciles with his surroundings. Earlier his mind was occupied with personal and professional compulsions. These exercises teach Paulo to forget all worldly matters and enjoy exploring the natural world. He is filled with a strong sense of gratitude and admiration for the beauty and bounty of nature. The striking environment start attracting him to the extent that he fails to notice the revisiting of the same hill for many times. At first Paulo participates in the rituals as an enforced assignment, but soon he starts enjoying it. The exercises free his mind of all thoughts and worries. Such ecstatic experience can be attained only through “meditation and relaxation” (86). The Burial Alive exercise makes him sense the strength of the world of nature, especially the earth, the worms, the air and the flowers (129-130) and consequently removes his fear of death forever. The most fearsome exercise converts into “...a joyful night, filled with peace” (131).

Luxuriant and spellbound scenic places, rippling fields, red sky, beautiful flora, a shepherd with his sheep, mountains, luxuriant vegetation, waterfall and rainbow near the water source along the path (137-138) make the view apparently fabulous and enchanting. Paulo climbs down the waterfall out of curiosity. Soon Petrus orders Paulo to climb up the mighty looking waterfall. This time Paulo is filled with the fear of falling down. For encouraging him Petrus decides to climb the waterfall first. He completes the adventure quite dexterously. Paulo feels hesitant to accomplish the act, but he has no other option rather than following his guide’s instruction. As suggested by his guide, Paulo offers his future achievement to Virgin Mary. Petrus advises Paulo to put all his learnings into practice and win the challenge and he proclaims, “This waterfall will teach you how to be a Master” (144). With an enormous amount of fear, Paulo sets for his mission. Soon he regains his faith and the reality seems to have more chances of winning than losing. Now he has regained his energy and power. He has started trusting his guide who calls from behind “Didn’t I tell you? Once a problem is solved, its simplicity is amazing” (145). Though the extremely cold water freezes his body yet he has the realisation of being alive and happy. Inwardly he praises himself and his guide for this wonderful sensation. His body and mind come in perfect harmony and he starts climbing steadily. The top of the fall again comes forth as a challenge but now Paulo would not allow the terror to re-enter his psyche. He has to fight for his existence and all the challenges thrown by the elements of nature before him have to be turned into opportunities. Finally Paulo wins the game and the mighty waterfall seems to be “just a trickle of water” (148). Nature which seemed invincible and indifferent earlier, has now become so welcoming and friendly that it is no more unfamiliar or dreading. Rather it has turned to be an adventurous companion for Paulo.

While inhaling air during the RAM Breathing exercise, Paulo’s body connects with the serenity, adoration and balance already prevalent in the universe. After performing the exercise for five minutes Paulo is



instructed to pronounce the word RAM. Petrus then elaborates nature by revealing its healing power. He says "... vegetation, and especially mature trees, are able to transmit harmony when one rests one's nerve centres against a tree trunk" (152). The guide conversed on the physical healing and spiritual aspect of the vegetation. Already familiar with the concept of the spiritual side of the nature, Paulo remarks that sometimes nature also behaves arbitrarily just like human beings. Humans often change their ideology and seem to be erratic. In the same manner the elements of nature very often behave strange. Man makes grand bridge to overcome and control the flow of water but strangely enough the water changes its route. Petrus doesn't seem to agree with him and interprets nature as a free and fair entity which rejects man's attempt to dominate it. But Petrus believes that nature always offers aid and support to every seeker. In his essay, Emerson strongly emphasises on the role and relevance of nature in human life by advocating, "There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, - no disgrace, no calamity which nature cannot repair" (Emerson 8).

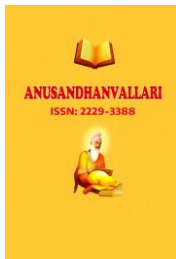
During his journey ahead, Legion, a dog's entry is irrefutably a manifestation of the protagonist's fear and suppressed dreams. His fight with the dog is a test and the protagonist finally wins over his flaws. Soon he realises, "Legion was the earth and fruits of the earth-the good fruits of the earth and the bad, but of the earth" (167). This incident explodes Agape, the highest, purest and selfless form of love within the protagonist. Finally a lamb leads Paulo to the chapel where his spiritual master is waiting for him to offer him the sword. The lamb becomes his "guide" (222) and leads him to his destination at that time when he is alone and clueless about the road and his sword. The lamb's role is very significant in accomplishing the journey of the protagonist on a satisfying and successful note. This helps him to again maintain the harmony between him and the universe. Paulo permeates with a new force and enthusiasm. He is now ready and equipped to fight "the good fight" (50).

The Natural World: A Pathway to inner amity and Harmony in *The Alchemist*

The main protagonist of the fiction *The Alchemist* is a young shepherd boy named Santiago, who desires more from life. Unlike other children of his age, he has some dreams for his future life. The novel begins with the sudden waking of the boy due to a recurring dream. Staying at an uninhibited and crumbling church under a sycamore tree, he is truly concerned for the safety of his sheep. Santiago loves to talk to his sheep. He spends day and night with them, protects them and in return "they generously gave of their wool, their company" (7). He understands their need of "food and water" (6) and is always concerned to take them to the best pastures in Andalusia. He has a passion of reading books and a great thirst to attain knowledge. He reads the books for his sheep. They are like his companion and always listen to him faithfully. "The boy prodded them, one by one, with his crook, calling each by name. He had always believed that the sheep were able to understand what he said" (4).

Santiago is an ordinary boy with extraordinary traits. His inclination for reading and his mastery in Latin, Spanish and Theology is quite impressive for anyone. His parents took pride of his being so wise and they wanted him to join the church and turn out to be a priest. But Santiago has some other dreams and aspirations. He doesn't want to bind himself in limits. He has a strong desire to explore new landscapes. So he prefers to become a shepherd rather than becoming a priest, preaching and "knowing God" (08). His parents unwillingly allow him to follow his dream. The boy is overjoyed as now he can do something to fulfil his dream. Each day he will visit a new land with his sheep and attain more thrill and joy.

The young shepherd meets a gypsy woman in Tarifa who could guide him by revealing the mystery of his recurring dream. She says, "...dreams are the language of God" (12). She advises him to follow his dream and also demands for a share of the treasure. His sudden encounter with an old man named Melchizedek proves to be a transformative point of his life. This old king of Salem advises Santiago to sell his flock and start his journey to Tangier. The old man suggests the boy to follow his dream in order to transform his life. The boy has always wanted to travel along with the sheep. He ponders, "In two years he had learned everything about shepherding: he knew how to shear sheep, how to care for pregnant ewes, and how to protect the sheep from



wolves. He knew all the fields and pastures of Andalusia. And he knew what was the fair price for every one of his animals” (25).

Now his life takes a turn and he has to make a choice between his flock and his dream. He decides to leave his life of a shepherd for a while. He makes his mind to pursue his dream. For that, he has to leave Andalusia and his sheep. In fact the sheep serve as his initial capital, which enable him to embark on his journey by providing him money for the venture.

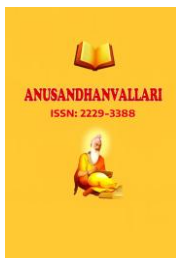
At Tangier, the boy is robbed by a rogue and he has to work as an assistant at a crystal merchant’s shop. Santiago learns the tricks of business and becomes a rich man in just a year.

Now he is capable of continuing his journey to the pyramids. He joins a caravan and meets an Englishman. The Englishman teaches Santiago that, “Everything on earth is being continuously transformed, because the earth is alive... and it has a soul. We are part of that soul...” (75). The Englishman has joined the caravan just to meet an old alchemist. Santiago has to stay at Al-Fayoum for some time. The oasis and its flora and fauna seem to conspire to make Santiago realise his dream. Santiago amazingly wonders at the realm of oasis with “three hundred wells and fifty thousand date trees” (84). Here the camels and horses become the main source of survival. His first encounter with the alchemist “dressed in black, with a falcon perched on his left shoulder” (104) happens to be another conspiracy of the divine to realise his destiny. The alchemist guides the travellers and seekers on the sign of the soul of the world. At present the alchemist has approached Santiago after receiving the sign of an omen from the heavens through the falcon. The old man tests the boy’s endurance and inquires about his ability to read the flight of the bird and the omen hidden behind it. Santiago responds unwaveringly, “Allah created the armies, and he also created the hawks. Allah taught me the language of the birds. Everything has been written with the same hand” (106). The boy passes the test and the alchemist is now available to guide him.

The oasis brings a new and positive turn in his life when he meets Fatima, the love of his life. The young lad suffers from the pangs of love and he makes his mind to stay with Fatima. But finding true love is not the ultimate dream of his life at present. The alchemist wants Santiago to leave Fatima for the time being and move further in order to search the treasure. He explains, “Fatima is a woman of the desert. She knows that men have to go away in order to return. And she already has her treasure: it’s you. Now she expects that you will find what it is you’re looking for”(113). She promises to wait for him and the alchemist and Santiago embark on their journey through the desert to the pyramids. Unfortunately, they come under the trap of the Tribesmen. In order to save their lives, the alchemist surrenders all the money to the chief and declares that Santiago can turn himself into wind. The perplexed lad observes,

There were mountains in the distance. And there were dunes, rocks and plants that insisted on living where survival seemed impossible. There was the desert that he had wandered for so many months; despite all that time, he knew only a small part of it. Within that small part, he had found an Englishman, caravans, tribal wars, and an oasis with fifty thousand palms and three hundred wells. (137)

Magical realism plays a very crucial role in bringing Santiago out of this conceivable danger by performing the extraordinary task of turning him into the wind. The desert, the wind and the sun directly communicate with him and help him in performing the miraculous task. Various forms of the wind named “sirocco, levanter and simum” (139- 141) are introduced to exhibit its versatility. The alchemist teaches Santiago to believe in the power of God, “the hand that wrote all” (144). Santiago gets insight from the wise alchemist and finally succeeds in reaching the pyramids. He starts to dig the area as per his visionary dream. Suddenly some men appear there and beat him badly. They want to rob the boy but fail to get anything. The boy tells them about his dream and the secret of the pyramids. One of them laughs at his foolishness, spares his life, and tells about his own recurring dream of indicating a church with a sycamore tree to Santiago and says, “... I am not so stupid as to cross an entire desert just because of a recurrent dream” (155). The boy stands up and feels elated. He has failed to get the treasure at the pyramids, but he surely knows the secret of the treasure. He has to traverse back to



Andalusia where the hidden treasure is buried under a sycamore tree. The young shepherd gets his treasure under a tree and nature once again aids him in achieving his dream. Santiago turns victorious after facing many perils and pitfalls during his journey. He has attained wisdom and inner amity along with the treasure and true love of his life.

Conclusion

The novels *The Alchemist* and *The Pilgrimage* are undoubtedly Paulo's greatest masterpieces. After facing many perils and pitfalls, Santiago finds his treasure along with his true love and Paulo accomplishes his journey of self exploration. With the help of his guide Paulo learns the RAM exercises which most of the times belong to the elements of nature. Undoubtedly nature is unbiased to one and all. Construction and destruction are integral part of nature and both go side by side. It is quite obvious that autumn will parch every single leaf but for sure it makes way for the spring season.

Paulo finally reconciles with the elements of nature just like Santiago who attains the state of gaining oneness with the elements of nature when he declares "I have inside me the winds, the deserts, the oceans, the stars and everything created in the universe" (*The Alchemist* 140). This is a vital fact that nature is an integral part of human life and the main source of human existence. Human rebellion and denial against the role of flora and fauna will only create chaos. Blinded with narcissism and superficial imperiousness, man's disregard of nature causes disharmony and very often comes forth in the form of serious damage. Nature is strong, stable, fearless and friendly towards every creature who seeks for it. Dr Paul Brunton strongly advocates

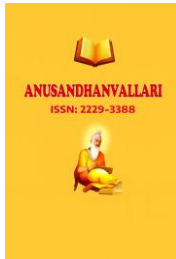
...to return to Mother Earth's friendly scenic solitudes and to make her enchanting beauty their mistress. In shady silent forests or on lofty rugged heights, beside quiet-flowing streams or unpeopled wave-beaten shores, in the earth's stillness, the sky's colour and the mountain's purity, they will always find healing balm for the wounds caused by contacts with a harsh unlovely world. (Brunton 34-35)

Paulo, the protagonist of *The Pilgrimage* learns to overcome his worries, fears and insecurities only after encountering various elements of nature. Not only Petrus but nature also plays the role of a guide who shows Paulo the right direction to follow during his journey. He learns to find joy in petty things like ordinary food, humble lodging, limited resources and appreciating everything around. The humility and unpretentiousness gained through the journey could never have been attained otherwise. Paulo's journey for his sword becomes successful only after maintaining a balance and affinity with the nature which in return plays the role of a nurturer, benefactor, saviour and protector. The role and relevance of nature in a man's life is also stressed on in Santiago's life when the desert can become a teacher to help him understand the omens related to the oasis (*The Alchemist* 114).

Vegetation and animals provide inner relief, support, shelter, solace and harmony to the protagonists during their inner turmoil and outer journey. The flora and fauna play a crucial role in providing emotional relief, inner contentment, mental peace and sometimes physical relaxation. The natural world becomes a pathway and creates a balance between the thoughts and actions of the seekers of self- realisation. Both Paulo and Santiago attain amity and peace and turn out to be the winners of their pursuits and dreams.

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