Chapter 2
Sublime encounter

Human life is a journey, a long quest for countless things. This quest which is estimated on the external level, is carried out by ordinary people in their day-to-day life for wealth, money, power, positions, materials, treasure, love, dear ones and this goes on endlessly. In this pursuit, they are subjected to acquire incredible experiences that mystify them. Mystical experience is a belief in the existence of realities beyond perception. Mystics hold that there is a deeper or more fundamental state of existence beneath the observable, day-to-day world of phenomena and that in fact the ordinary world is superficial or epiphenomenal. Often it centres on the teachings of individuals who are considered to have special insight. As a rule, mysticism is less concerned with religious differences and more concerned with social or individual development. Mysticism (mystikos) is a Greek term which means to conceal. It is an immediate consciousness of the transcendent or ultimate reality or God; the belief in realities beyond perceptual or intellectual understanding, its ultimate goal is to seek union with the object of love, the one reality, God (Mysticism- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <en. Wikipedia. Org/wiki/mysticism>).

Theologically, mystical faiths tend to stress the divine immanence and often identify God with the structure of being. It refers to a type of faith that emphasizes the direct experience of unity with the divine. In general, mysticism would best be thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined in different traditions. It is a sort of vague, groundless speculation - a spiritual quest for union with the divine (Definition of Quest by the Free Online Dictionary, Thesaurus
& Encyclopedia <http://www.the free dictionary.com/quest>). Quest refers to an extraordinary journey performed by ordinary people; those who have faith in divine immanence, to experience the ultimate reality. Basically this hunt may begin in a simple plane but it ultimately reaches the noble plane. Mystical quest transcends human perceptions through different phases. It nourishes the soul or the spirit with spiritual essence. It enables the soul to commune with the soul of the world, God. In order to teach these, the soul allows itself to be tortured, admits stresses and torments, dwells in gloominess which is unbearable, trusting in the divine union.

An article entitled “Religion - Spiritual Quest” states that spiritual leaders have shown the path of spiritual discipline to enable mankind aspire for that which is permanent rather than get caught in the unstable and unending cycle of birth. The upheavals in one’s life can easily agitate and affect the mind leaving one in a state of hopelessness and despair. To aim for peace of mind is the crux and essence of spiritual quest and Sri Ramakrishna taught the way towards this goal by advocating the value of Sat Sangh or association with the holy, the pious and the devout, pointed out by Swami Gautamananda in a lecture. Such association helps us to think of God continuously when we get tied down by worldly distraction. Practice of austerities such as meditation and concentration can help to purify the mind of its distractions. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavat Gita that spiritual discipline is arduous and the means of attaining the goal of God is also very challenging. The Lord stresses on practice and the need to renounce attachment to worldly affairs as absolutely essential for one seeking salvation.
The general tendency to shelve the spiritual quest to a later point of time in one’s life is not advocated because it might not turn out to be effective. A nation that is not prepared for war will be at a loss to cope with the exigencies arising during an outbreak or aggression. Similarly when difficulties strike us, we will be better prepared to face them with courage and fearlessness if the spiritual fervour is cultivated in us. Initiation into the devotional path from early childhood is advised for this can become a habit in due course and help nurture faith. Though knowledge of worldly matters is essential for us who are a part of this world, this alone is insufficient when it comes to attaining the goal of life. Knowledge of God is the only support and solace to those caught in worldly sorrows and misery. The awareness of God’s infinite presence and his impartial compassion towards all being should become an integral aspect in our understanding. By repeatedly focusing on this awareness, one slowly gains the convictions about it. From conviction, springs faith. Faith in God is the greatest hope for mankind (The Hindu 2008).

Generally many writers concentrate on social or individual identity, whereas Paulo Coelho explores spiritual identity. His approach to spirituality is often strange. For he who has the potential to reach a wide range of audience, always takes a very universalist approach which appeals to everyone. His protagonists are common men. Instead of presenting tantalizing tales of violence, thrills or sex, Coelho writes of regular people who put themselves in extraordinary situations to nurture their innerselves using unpretentious, unadorned prose. In all his novels, mysticism can be perceived from various prospects. The chosen novels of Paulo Coelho offers a crystal clear picture of what mysticism is, at which deadlock one comprehends mysticism and how to introspect oneself.
Coelho’s debut novel *The Pilgrimage* (1987) is a contemporary quest for wisdom. He recounts the spectacular trials that lead him to discover personal power, wisdom and a miraculous sword that seals his initiation into the secret society of the Tradition. The protagonist starts his search to find his magical sword which lies hidden somewhere unknown. This journey becomes a truly initiatory experience and Coelho, the protagonist, is transformed forever as he learns to understand the nature of truth, and the simplicity of life. In this novel, the author himself performs certain rituals to acquire unusual powers in his search for the sacred sword. Paulo Coelho begins his expedition by being tested with endurance and fear. Petrus is introduced as his leader through his pilgrimage. He is instructed by Petrus to listen to him in every turn, no matter what (The Pilgrimage by Paulo Coelho Reviews, Discussion, Book Clubs, Lists <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4004.The-Pilgrimage>). It is through reality Coelho acquires mystical experiences with the help of his guide Petrus who teaches him through certain exercises that revive his potentiality. Through channelling, his mind and spirit sustain reformation which enables him to perceive the language spoken by the world. The dog that appears throughout empowers him to drive away his dream or enemy. His mental stability is enforced. Thus, the RAM practices and various channelling exercises enable him to introspect his own self.

On the night of January 2, 1986 the protagonist and his master are accompanied by the author’s wife, one disciple, a local guide and a representative of the great fraternity that is the tradition as they start their pilgrimage. The author kneels to dig an elongated hole in the earth to perform certain rituals in front of the bonfire. These five, including the guide, are at one of the high peaks of Serrada Mar close to Agulhas Negras in Brazil to perform the order of RAM. The author’s old
sword which has helped him in performing hundreds of magical operations is being offered to the earth. He is then blessed with a new sword by his master with due rituals. He has been instructed that if he draws the sword, an act of goodness should be performed with its point to replace it. From then on, the protagonist becomes a Magus - a sorcerer. His master hides the sword with the help of the author’s wife. The master then declares that due to his avidity, the author is deemed to seek again for his sword. For his pride, fascination and miracles, he has to struggle to recapture the sword among simple people. Since neither of the swords is given to him, he begins his quest powerless and defenseless. It is said that the sword would be at the right time on the right day at some point on the road to Santiago in Spain which he is going to take.

Muslims have the custom of going on a pilgrimage from Mecca to Medina initiated by Muhammad. Similarly, in Christianity the first millennium considers three routes sacred. The first route leads to the tomb of Saint Peter in Rome, its travellers are named wanderers and their symbol is cross. The second route leads to the holy sepulcher of Christ in Jerusalem; its travellers are palmists with palm branches as their symbol. The third one is Compostela the starfield; its travellers are pilgrims with scallop shell. Santiago is otherwise known as the milky way, a common road that is being travelled by many million people from Europe. Inspite of his discontentment, the author convinces himself that his pilgrimage along the Road to Santiago would help him find himself. At Saint - Jean - Pied-de-Port, he meets Mme. Lourdes who introduces him to his guide. After crossing over forty miles from where he has started, he meets his guide. They exchange a few code words to establish their identity. The guide Petrus, on the way, teaches him many exercises and rituals and talks in praise of the RAM practice for its simplicity - R for rigour; A for agnus and M for mimdi. The exercises that he learns throughout make him realize many authentic
experiences. They diminish his burdens, increase his speed, make him aware of his surroundings and enable him to realize God’s presence.

After seven days of journey, they reach a tavern where they are to meet a great sorcerer, monk Father Jordi. He gives them a detailed sketch of the four routes of the Jacobean out of which he should choose one. The author carries an image of Our Lady of the visitation, mounted on three scallop shell as a means of identification everywhere. Having verified the scallop shell, the monk quotes the Bible: “wherever your treasure is, there will be your heart; wherever the heart is, there will be the cradle of the second coming of Jesus Christ” (The Pilgrimage 48). Amidst their conversation about the existence of God, Petrus says that God lives in all human hearts in the form of love and faith. The guide teaches him Cruelty Exercise to punish himself at the time of guilt, remorse, indecision, jealousy, hatred, envy and cowardice. Petrus suggests that a devil is also an angel or a messenger but a rebellious force with whose help everyone fights a good fight. Consequently he teaches him the messenger ritual but forbids him from disclosing the messenger to anybody. With the help of the hotel owner, they meet the gypsy who possesses a dog. At her home, the author feels something mysterious. It goes to the extent of hurting him, then all of a sudden everything vanishes. He is then taught the Water Exercise to create a new way of communication with souls. He cultivates a habit of conversing with his messenger Astrain to enquire about the road to Santiago and his sword.

Petrus himself stands as a mediator between the author and his goal directing him cautiously. During their journey, Petrus talks about Eros - a feeling of love between two people; Philos - love in the form of friendship; and Agape - a common feeling present in both Eros and Philos; total love felt by Jesus for mankind. They indulge in the ritual of Agape - the Blue Sphere Exercise. The author has been
advised to experience the love only with which he can reach the target on the road to Santiago. He is entirely immersed in the Blue Sphere Exercise in his reminiscence, his messenger - Astrain. On their way to Santo Domingo, they come across an abandoned house and an olive tree. In between, is a dog staring at the author. This is something like fighting the evil or demon which he has to win in this pursuit, the author answers a few mysterious questions; later he is comforted by a nun from Azofra convent. Petrus prevents the author who tries to defeat the demon or legion with the help of this messenger Astrain. Petrus even advocates death as inevitable. To overcome fear over death, he teaches him the Buried Alive Exercise. They come across a basin opened up in the plateau. Ascending the Oasis seems to be a complicated task to them. Having ascended, they endeavour to climb up the waterfalls nearby to expose their strength. The author, being motivated by his guide, decides to dive into the lagoon. During their walk across the village Foncebadon, at a distance, there is an iron cross as a landmark on the road to Santiago. The Shadow Exercise has taught the protagonist to pay keen attention on the casting shadows. By meditating on the wrong solution which is being taught by his guide Petrus, he is able to know the hide out of his magical sword. The author, in the pursuit of their journey, learns that they are surrounded by evil spirits. The repeated appearance of the dog strengthens his will power to overcome the obstacles in his road to Santiago - to win the sword. During their descent, once again the author experiences that absolute silence he had felt with the appearance of the dog.

Petrus teaches him to listen to silence (which also possesses sound) that enables one to make the right decisions. Thus the Listening Exercise is taught to the author. To test his mental stamina, he is ordered to straighten a toppling wooden cross inspite of his lacerations. Initially he finds it impossible but to obey his guide,
he plunges into executing his order and comes out triumphantly with the help of the Shadows Exercise and the RAM practices. The cross episode seems to be a history to him. The purpose of lifting the cross is to enable him to walk on the road to Rome so that he can find the sword and learn its secret. At last, one day the guide departs from him, teaching him the Dance Exercise. Further he suggests to the author to be a guide in future through which he can really implement whatever he has learned.

Since then he receives commands pertaining to his journey. He reaches the castle of templers as per the note. There he meets nine of them from various places who are also involved in their pilgrimage towards the Road to Santiago. He beholds seven figures in their secular costumes of a templer in the place of an altar from the ruined chapel which is suddenly illuminated by torches. The author identifies one of the templers as his guide Petrus who does not recognize him since he is in trance. There they perform a ritual in their sacred robe, being directed by the high priest to feel the presence of the supreme God El whom they have invoked. Unlike others, the author sees in his imagination a shining bird hovering in the corner of the chapel, sprinkling water on them at which the high priest writes seventy two names associated with God. A circle is being drawn by the high priest for them to perform the Dance Exercise within. At the end of the ritual, the high priest and a knight call the Australian boy Andrew among the nine to receive his sword from his master. The author grows envious of the boy who receives his sword. He is immersed in a sort of loneliness having none to guide him any further. In desperation, he reaches Villafrancedel Bierzo where he meets a little girl. She requests him to take her to the gates of forgiveness. He, at first tries to ignore her but then he is reminded of the quotations of the apostle Paul, “he that plowed should plow in hope. He that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope” (The Pilgrimage 207). This boosts his confidence to find his sword and its secret. Besides he finds a copy of The
Pilgrims guide with his key in his room. On reaching the gates of forgiveness, he is disappointed to see only Santiago’s sword there rather than his. As he leaves Villafranca, he is recurrently reminded of the little girl and the man named angel who have offered to help him. He senses a sort of link between the two and feels optimistic for he has taken the right direction. He makes some calculations to reach Santiago de Compostela in the afternoon. For the first time amidst his RAM practices, he experiences Agape not only embracing him but also brushing aside all his doubts pertaining to his sword. Now from how to find his sword his focus switches over to what to do with the sword.

In the afternoon, as he is ascending the last mountain El Cebrero he is engulfed by clouds. It appears to him as though the Road to Santiago begins to walk towards him. A voice from within urges him to walk incessantly. In forty minutes, he reaches the top of El Cebrero. He wishes to pray at the foot of the cross yet being unable to pray, he just stares at the cross. His entire spirit is filled with a curiosity to behold his sword. To his astonishment, there comes a lamb which pauses before the cross. All of a sudden, a terrible pain encircles him. He sobs severely over the toilsome effort that he has endured. The lamb, then, takes him towards El Cebrero where his action is transmitted into his belief. Some mysterious fear pervades him which forces him to pray. At the altar, he sees his master with his sword, looking at the dark sky out of the chapel. His master, after saying the sacred psalm, touches his shoulder with the blade and holds out his sword to him. He leaves a note regarding this to his guide Petrus as a token of gratitude.

Many instances in the novel *The Pilgrimage* can be set as illustrations to exhibit Paulo Coelho’s meticulous use of mysticism. Coelho’s experiences and his mentor’s teachings impart the spiritual wisdom that reveals itself as the true purpose
of their exciting journey. Trying to collect his thoughts and feelings, while almost being tricked by a supposed demon, Paulo Coelho comes across a handful of events that remind him that simplicity holds greater power over all. As his journey with Petrus continues, he is faced with his worst fear that comes in the shape of a vicious dog. He conquers his fear with unknown powers that manifest in him as if by magic (Paulo Coelho’s The Pilgrimage A Review: A Tale of Self - Discovery and Triumph <http://writing memoirs, suite 101. com/article, cfm/paulo coelho's - the pilgrimage - a - review #>). The dog which often threatens the protagonist mystifies him; it is called the demon-the evil spirit or his enemy Legion. It appears on various occasions and every time it enables the author to defend himself and defeat his enemy. It is implied that by defeating his enemy - the dog, he learns how to rule out his pessimism, his fear, his submission to the evil spirit and he becomes more powerful. The first entry of the dog is when the author with his guide Petrus, sets to meet the gypsy who has hurled her curses on the village Estella. While they are having their tea, being served by the gypsy woman suddenly the author feels as if he is hypnotized by the dog. He becomes weak and utters some strange words at the dog and grows wild. But some mysterious power prevents the author from being bitten by the dog.

I became more excited and continued to speak, louder and louder. The dog rose and bared his teeth. He was no longer the docile animal I had seen on arrival but something awful and threatening that could attack me at any moment. I know that the words were protecting me, and I began to speak even louder focusing all of my energies on the dog. I felt that I had different power within me and that it could keep the animal from attacking me. (78)
Again in Azofra, the author smells the presence of the same black dog which has threatened him previously. It stands between an olive tree and an abandoned house. His eyes are also fixed on the dog propelled by a voice. He could not identify whether the voice belongs to Astrain or his guardian angel. Yet he obeys it which warns him not to withdraw. During this process, he tries to convey the purpose of the pilgrimage on the road to the dog.

Here I was, I thought, after having experienced the wonder of love that consumes, once again about to be confronted by the daily and constant threats to my existence that the world would always present. I wondered why the animal has followed me for such a great distance. And what it was that he wanted: after all, I was just a pilgrim in quest of my sword and I had neither the desire nor the patience for problems with people or animals. (117)

The dog, perhaps, gets ready to attack him. Overcoming his fear the author gets the courage to fight with the dog. Inspite of some physical discomforts, he manages to do it.

In fraction of a second during which the image had crossed my line of sight, my stomach relaxed. I felt that I had a powerful friend who was there to help me through this absurd, unnecessary conflict. (118)
This conflict between the author and the dog to decide who is powerful, reaches its zenith towards the end of the novel. As soon as he defeats the dog, all his obstacles in finding the sword and his fear seem to dispel.

I was paying too much respect to the strength of my enemy and this was a trap. He could not be any stronger than I. He might be more agile but he could not be stronger [...] my fear had lessened but I wasn’t in control of myself yet, and with the rock in my hand, I began to shout at the dog. He withdrew a little further. (164)

Despite his desperation, he becomes strong. It appears ridiculous for him to fight with an animal. At once he decides to put an end to the absurd business of sword and the strange Road to Santiago. Once again the dog hurls at him. By biting his hand, it evades the rock easily. The author makes a hard fight at least to safeguard himself from the bite. The dog, eventually seems to take possession of the author. At an unexpected moment, a voice from within is heard “the voice said that if the dog established dominion over me, the fight would be over, and I would be saved; defeated but alive” (164).

So the author transforms himself into a dog. He bares his teeth like that of a dog and growls to terrify the brute. With the sole intention of outwitting him, the author calls the dog to the basement of one of the houses. Right there, with no escape route the author intends to show the brute what death is. Suddenly something zooms into his thinking and he sees the face of a gypsy,
My thinking was becoming cloudy, and I began to see a gypsy’s face with vague images dancing around it. I had turned myself into legion—the demon. This was the source of my power. [...] The many devils were in me. I felt a terrible desire to destroy the defenseless animal. You are the prince, and they are legion whispered Astrain [...] I heard from a distance the voice of my master. He has insisted that there was a sword to be won. I had to resist for one more minute. I should not kill-that dog. (166-67)

As he begins to open up and start his inward journey, he is aided by a series of exercises that make his transition into the sphere of the unfamiliar much easier (Paulo Coelho’s The Pilgrimage—A Review. A Tale of Self-Discovery and Triumph<http://writing memoirs, suite 101. com/article, cfm/paulo coelho - the pilgrimage - a - review #>). Throughout, the guide Petrus teaches him several exercises to enforce his mental stability. The Seed Exercise is the first one the author learns. It is an exercise through which he could achieve rebirth. It is something like that of the germination of a seed. Soon everything becomes dark and he perceives strange movements in his physique. Something in him wants to move upwards like a shoot. It compels him to raise his fingers and arms. The force that enables him to break is the field. He feels as if his arms are spreading and his body is stretching. It has been like reincarnation. He desires to be purified both internally and externally by the heat of the sun that has nourished him to grow.
Another exercise that helps him to rule out his fear is the Buried Alive Exercise. In the extremity of darkness, he is threatened by the sounds of the nocturnal animals that intensify his palpitation. He lies down and crosses his arms resolutely so as to turn the source of fear into a stimulus for his exercise. Despite the cold, he perspires. He imagines his burial exactly, his coffin being closed, screws being tightened.

I was immobile, but I was alive and I wanted to tell my family that I was seeing everything. I wanted to tell them all that I loved them, but not a sound came out of my mouth. My father and mother weeping, my wife and my friends were gathered around, but I was completely alone! (128)

He toils desperately to open his eyes to hit the lid of the coffin to imply that he is alive. He possesses streams of consciousness regarding his failure in various matters. Being powerless to move, he is envious of the alive. He imagines as if his coffin is being taken to the grave. He is highly tensed up. He is going to be buried. He is frozen in the terror of death. He is all alone in the grave. He screams and cries to God for help. He determines to get away with his full strength. Tears roll down from his eyes. To him, the coffin is lowered into the ground and the grave digger’s shovels are filling in the grave.

I am alive! Buried alive! I sense that the air is being cut off and the fragrance of the flowers is awful. I hear the mourners’ departing footsteps, my terror is total. (129)
He attempts repeatedly for his escape and finally he succeeds in getting out of it breathing the fresh air of the road to Santiago.

Where is God; why doesn’t he help me? [...] I have to get away! I am shut up in this cold, dark grave, alone and being eaten alive! The air is giving out and the worms are eating me! I have to move. I have to break out of this coffin! God, help me gather all of my strength, because I have to escape! I have to get out of here; I have to [...] I did it! (130)

A great sense of calmness descends over him. He feels a kind of presence around him which is the face of death, being created by his own fears and imagination. He believes that true death, his friend and counselor, would eliminate his regrets. He would disclose the mysteries to him sooner.

[...] He was going to help me fight the good fight. Never again, ever, was I going to feel ridiculous about doing anything. Because he was there, saying that when he took me in hand to travel with me to other worlds. I should leave behind the greatest sin of all: regret. With the certainty of his presence and the gentleness of his face, I was sure that was going to be able to drink from the fountain of life. (131)

After this, the night does not contain any horrors. Instead it is a joyful night, filled with peace. That darkness has never been so reassuring to him. While walking across the bridge of Fuenta de la Kaina, Petrus is attracted by two boys who are
playing with a rubber on the banks of the river. His attention has been distracted towards the boys rather than on the road. When the ball falls near him, Petrus throws the ball to them. But it is caught by the author. As the eldest boy approaches him, he has an idea of giving up the ball. But something has overruled what is happening. The boy’s face seems to be familiar once “my first impulse was to throw him the ball, but Petrus’ behaviour had been so unusual that I decided that I would try to understand what was happening” (59).

After asking the ball for the umpteenth time, the lad picks up a stone to attack the author. Yet he remains stubborn “Throw the stone’, I answered ‘if it hits me, I’ll come over there and whack you one’. I sensed that Petrus gave a sigh of relief. Something in the back of my mind told me that I had already lived through this scene” (60). At the words of the author, the boy becomes fear-stricken, so he shows a relic of a rich pilgrim and states if he hands over the ball, he will give him the relic. He rejects the relic. Now the boy who has been so aggressive, grows meek. In tears he says, “look, mister [...] you are strong and you’ve been around and you know the world. All I know is the edge of this river and that ball is my only toy. Please give it back” (60). All these words of the boy appear to be familiar. So he remains rigid inspite of the pleading of the boy. The boy goes to the extent of offering enough money to buy a better ball. At that moment, for a fraction, time seems to stop, “The surroundings began to change, even without Petrus’ finger at my neck; for a fraction of a second, it seemed that we had been transported to a broad, terrifying ashen desert” (60).
The boy appears to be older, kinder and friendlier. A sudden flash of light in his eyes frightens him. Petrus later gets the ball from him and hands it over to the boy. Besides, he discloses the reason for making the author behave in such a way. He says, “in fact, it was. It allowed you to win over your personal devil” (61). In the end, we discover that the extraordinary is always found in the ordinary and simple ways of everyday people. Part adventurous story, part guide to self-discovery, this compelling tale delivers the perfect combination of enchantment and insight. In this piece of art, Coelho’s quest on the physical medium ends in mystical experiences and that finally ends in spiritual experiences. Coelho’s experiences and his mentor’s teachings impart the spiritual wisdom that reveals itself as the true purpose of their exciting journey. The search of truth is assimilated to a personal search for meaning, for the things that we need in life such as truth, enthusiasm, agape, and spirituality. Coelh learns to search his spirit for the wisdom to understand the truth behind his sword.

*The Alchemist* is Paulo Coelho’s second book. After the dull sale of his debut book *The Pilgrimage*, Coelho published *The Alchemist* which brought him an unexpected recognition as the best author by hitting the best sellers book lists worldwide. In 2002 the journal Letras de Portugal, the foremost literary authority in the Portuguese language bestowed upon *The Alchemist* the title of the most sold book in the history of the language. With over 20 million copies sold worldwide *The Alchemist* has already achieved the status of a modern classic. This tender and gentle, immensely readable adventure story about a shepherd boy who learns to live his dreams has been compared to the works of Richard Bach. The term alchemy means the process of converting any metal into gold. An Alchemist is a person who is an expert in this process. Paulo Coelho has justly chosen the title *The Alchemist* for in
the novel as the protagonist Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy is gradually transformed into a mystic.

*The Alchemist* is an adventurous story fall of magic and wisdom. The protagonist Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd is fond of travelling far in order to see castles and lands. He is compassionate to his sheep. He makes money out of sheep shearing once a year. During one such visit to a merchant to shear his sheep in a village near Andalusia, he falls in love with the merchant’s daughter who also happens to be one of the reasons for him to wish to make his dream come true. As days pass by, he has a recurrent dream in which he wakes up before it ends - a dream in which he tries to find a laden treasure. An abandoned church, the sacristy which has been replaced by an enormous sycamore becomes his residence. To him, the world is huge and inexhaustible. An old woman interprets his dream when he goes to Tarifa to get his books. She interprets his dream as the language of God which he has just begun to learn. He then gives her a detailed account of his dream which ends at the Egyptian Pyramids. A child in his dream invites him to the majestic Pyramids to find a hidden treasure. The old woman demands one-tenth of the treasure for consultation and directs him to the Pyramids in Egypt - an unknown place to both. Besides she says that he will be a rich person if he finds the treasure. His passion is aggravated by an unknown king, an old man who intercepts him introducing himself as king Melchizedek of Salem and questions him often. The king’s knowledge about the book amazes him.

Every book speaks about people’s inability to choose their own destiny and in conclusion it says everyone believes in the world’s greatest lie, that is, at a certain point in our lives, we lose our control of what is happening to us, and as a result our
lives become controlled by fate. The old man comes forward to help the boy to find his treasure if only he consents to give him one-tenth of the treasure. Santiago is shocked on hearing this for he has not disclosed his dream about the treasure. The old man writes something on the sand with a stick, in quick succession. But something that has glistened from his chest blinds Santiago momentarily. To his surprise, those are the names of his father, mother, the seminary that he has attended and the most exciting one is the name of the merchant’s daughter which he has not been aware of.

In the beginning, Santiago mistakes him for an illiterate but is dumb-struck on his profound knowledge. The old man states that he has willfully come to render him help since he has discovered his destiny. About destiny, the old man comments that every one becomes aware of the destiny when they are young. Everything is clear and possible for them at that point. But a mysterious force persuades them making them realize it as an impossible one. This force though negative, helps one to realize one’s destiny and prepares one’s spirit as well as will power accordingly. The desire of the soul of the universe instigates one to set his mission on earth. Like Santiago, it may be to travel or to marry the merchant’s daughter or even seek treasure. In order to fulfil one’s destiny or obligation, the whole universe conspires in helping to achieve it.

Paulo Coelho has also mentioned this giving up point or accommodator in another novel *The Zahir*.

There is always an event in our lives that is responsible for us failing to progress: a trauma, a particularly bitter defeat, a disappointment in love, even a victory
that we did not quite understand, can make cowards of
us and prevent us from moving on. (238)

The old man even narrates the way he has helped a miner in *The Alchemist* when he is about to give up his effort in despair. Boosting his confidence, the boy gets a clue about his treasure which he says is uncovered by the force of flowing water at the same time it is buried under the water. To make this more obvious, the king demands one-tenth of his flock. He could not contain his eagerness to find the treasure whenever he sees the small building where tickets to Africa are issued. He is swung between being a shepherd and becoming rich. Standing on top of the stone ramp, viewing Africa from a distance, his determination gets stronger as the Levanter, a strong wind, stimulates him. The following day, he meets the old man with six sheep and expresses his desire to follow his dream. To inspire him, the old man says that being a shepherd is a good omen. In *Brida*, Coelho refers to shepherds as “God’s favourites for they possess all the necessary virtues to commune with the universe” (144). The old man calls the good omen as the principle of favourability or beginner’s luck. That is whatever game we play we attain success for the first time as there is a force that expects us to realize our destiny victoriously.

Not only Africa appears strange to him but also the language Arabic spoken there. Enough money and his training with sheep have made him optimistic in choosing the paths by observing the ground and the sky. Moreover, he is undaunted because he is certain that God will guide him in all his deeds while he takes good care of the sheep itself. In Tangier Santiago is deceived by a youngman speaking Spanish who slips away with his money. He is bewildered and accuses God of being unfair to him. The old man’s saying echoes in his mind “when you want something, the whole
universe conspires in helping you to achieve it” (The Alchemist 42). With renewed courage, he dares to challenge the world once again. Though he is tempted to sell the stones, fearing the thieves, he safeguards it. To him, the stones are like the old man. For the first time he asks the stones if he possesses the blessings of the old man. The stones affirm it. The advice of the old man flashes in his thought when he attempts for yet another question: “learn to recognize omens and follow them” (43). So he dares to do things on his own. He consoles himself even if he is incapable of reaching the Pyramids, he will be satisfied having travelled so far. Two alternatives lie in front of him-one is to be a poor victim of a thief or to establish himself as an adventurer questing treasure. With an air of pride, he calls himself an adventurer looking for treasure. Suddenly he is struck by an idea of buying some sheep and so he determines to work for a merchant. Of course, he receives a good remuneration from the merchant. In many ways, he tries to improve the status of the shop by setting display case to attract the customers.

The merchant, pleased with Santiago’s endeavours, explains the five obligations devised in Koran by the prophet. Out of the five, he sticks strongly to the fifth one which is the dream of every individual muslim - that is a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. Every muslim is deemed to visit the holy city at least once in their life. Propelled by the dream, he becomes a crystal wares merchant. Since crystals are too delicate to handle, he could not put anyone in charge of the shop. Hence his dream remains unfulfilled though the very thought of Mecca itself has kept him alive to face the challenges. Unlike him, the boy’s dream forces him to conquer it though he oscillates between buying sheep and going to Egypt. Fortune smiles at him with her bounty. He can either buy sheep or start a business through his fluency in Arabic. By that time, he has become efficient in selling crystal, learning the
language without words and especially studying omens. The prime factor of an Alchemist is discovering the Master work - the Philosopher’s stone and the Elixir of life. To achieve this, the English man whom Santiago meets on his journey goes to the desert to build a rapport with Alchemists who are generally self-centered. The Englishman is inspired by a famous Arabian Alchemist who has accomplished himself in alchemy. His interest is being triggered by his friend who reports to Santiago about an Arab in the desert possessing exceptional powers. He learns that the Arab is 200 years old, lives at the al-fayoum Oasis. He is adept in transforming any metal into gold. Until then, Santiago’s dream and the treasure remain a mystery. The stranger identifies the precious stones in the hands of Santiago while he passes time playing with it. He makes him understand the worth and significance of it. A warning against the break out of the tribal war is given. An absolute silence pervades the air due to fear. For the second time, he experiences the universal language - expression without words. With no other alternative, they move on putting the burden on the mysterious word Maktub. Their journey picks up speed. With full protective measures, they rest at night. Once in the desert, the Englishman, accompanied by the boy goes for a walk on the dune where they discuss their life frankly.

The Englishman is amazed at the quick progress of the crystal shop solely due to Santiago. This positive force in alchemy, he says, is the soul of the world. Beyond human perception, everything is being transformed because the earth is alive and has a soul. Seldom we are able to recognize the help it does. Even in the crystal shop, the glasses would have contributed much to the boy’s success. Understanding the language of the soul is essential to get through anything. Although he is interested in alchemy, he could not indulge in it thoroughly for everyone has his own way of learning things like the Englishman who dislikes to learn the soul of the universe. Yet
they are in search of their own destiny. They approach the Oasis. The boy is fascinated by the beauty of the stars, endless rows of date palms across the desert. He wishes to enjoy the present moment, for one day or other this also would become a memorable day. So he wishes to relish the grand festival of life gifted by God. He feels as if the vision of date palms is a good sign to predict a miracle. They are instructed to remain in the Oases until the conflict ends. To the boy, things have become more difficult as he goes closer to his dream - the treasure. In the pursuit of dream, he is being constantly put to test of his persistence and courage right from the moment he started. He has seen the omens as simple things of the world rather than realizing them as the language of God to instruct people.

The Englishman sets out with Santiago to find the Alchemist at the Oasis. There they run into a young woman named Fatima who comes there to fetch water. With her help, the Englishman moves towards the Alchemist’s residence. Amidst this, the boy senses some mysterious reaction on seeing her. Her smile seems to be a sign for which he has so far waited. He falls in love that he forgets his past and the future. He believes that the same hand that has written everything under the sun, has evoked love in the two souls. He calls that love Maktub for it has given meaning to his dreams. Santiago proposes to Fatima. To him, she is more precious than his treasure. He is afraid of losing her if he goes in search of treasure. But the girl boosts up his courage suggesting that the women on the desert are proud of their men going in search of treasure. She recounts her belief that Maktub would certainly bring him back to her if she is really a part of his dream. In the meantime, the Englishman is almost settled in the desert in a tent and is executing the first phase of his job-separating the sulphur. The reason for the intervening of the Englishman’s plot is to emphasize the eventual transformation of the boy. The Englishman is converted from
The boy affirms to them of his potential to realize the soul of the world. During his retreat to his tent, he is suddenly thrown out on the ground by a wind. Amidst the dust, a man in white horse with his troop is seen standing with his sword to warn him against his reading of the flight of the hawks. Santiago defends that Allah is the source for creating both the armies and the hawks. It is the same hand that teaches him the language of birds. Everything has been written by the same hand. After knowing the reason for his wandering on the desert, the man blesses him with his sword and retreats permitting the boy to meet him at the sunset. The following day the tribesmen with arms attack the intruder’s tent killing everyone including the commander who has been put to death with honour. As a mark of appreciation, the boy has been rewarded with fifty pieces of gold.

The Alchemist informs the boy that his arrival has already been forecast by the omens. The boy is frozen at the words of the Alchemist which are once said by the old king “when a person really desires something, all the universe conspired to help the person to realize his dream” (120). Knowing his enthusiasm and knowledge in grasping the omens, he shows him the direction to his treasure. As per his instruction, Santiago sells his camel and buys a horse for it knows the language of life. At a particular spot, they dismount from the horse and the Alchemist searches for
something in a hole amidst the stones. Finally he stoops towards the hole reaching out for a venomous cobra which seems harmless to him for his two hundred years of experience has taught him to handle it carefully. He makes the serpent immobile within a circle with his power. All these things are done to imply to the boy that Pyramids are surrounded by the desert. In order to find his treasure, the boy has to learn about the life in the desert. On the other hand, the boy’s thoughts are inclined towards Fatima rather than the treasure for which he has toiled so far. He thinks that venturing out for treasure means he has to abandon Fatima - his beloved. Reading his thoughts, the Alchemist dictates to him about the importance of following one’s dream with the help of the omens which is not explicit to all. He remarks that the boy’s happiness with Fatima, his camel and sheep would be momentary. If he ignores the signs now, it would abandon him eventually. Besides, he says, true love speaks the language of the world that never constrains anyone from pursuing his destiny.

Persuaded by him, Santiago ventures to pursue his dream guided by the Alchemist. On the seventh day the Alchemist makes a camp and his falcon flies out to find the prey. The boy wishes to learn more from him but the Alchemist suggests that everything he needs to learn has to be done through his journey. He comments that the Master work is inscribed simply on an emerald tablet. It is a direct passage to the soul of the world that is apprehended only by the wisemen. So as a beginner, Santiago has to learn the marvels of creation present in a simple grain of sand. As a first sign of danger, on the following day, they come across three tribesmen. They check Santiago for weapons and they let him go after knowing his purpose. The second danger approaches when they pass by the encampment of the Arabs on the desert. Suddenly two horsemen emerge before them, hampering their process. However, the Alchemist mesmerizes them and they move on. With only two days to
reach the Pyramids, the Alchemist teaches him alchemy. He details that alchemy is nothing but penetrating into the soul of the world and discovering the treasure reserved for one. Moreover, the boy has already learnt how to discover his treasure. He then explains the transformation of metal into gold, his Master work and its link with one’s destiny.

During their journey towards the Pyramids of Egypt, the boy senses some danger and soon they are surrounded by gigantic dunes followed by many horse men. Suspecting them to be spies, they take them to their chief. To defend themselves, the Alchemist introduces himself as a person guiding an Alchemist -the boy. Further he intentionally adds that the boy possesses some extraordinary powers which he would like to exhibit to them. He also hands over the boy’s gold coins to the chief. With his power, he says that, he could even destroy the camp and he is capable of transforming himself into wind. The boy is bewildered at his words because he does not have the least idea of transforming himself into wind. On observing this, the Alchemist inspires him by telling about alchemy. He says that alchemy brings spiritual perfection into contact with material plane in order to attain perfection. So with self-confidence, he resolves to learn the secret of transforming himself. Of course, he succeeds in his endeavour only with the help of the desert and the wind. The wind with its force helps him to meet the sun and they converse about the soul of the world which is made of love. He experiences a current of love that induces him to pray. He perceives many mysterious things. He realizes that only the hand could perform miracles. It even enables him to realize that the soul of the world is a part of the soul of God himself. This grants him the potentials to perform miracles. The Alchemist’s joy is inexplicable for he has got a perfect disciple. On the other side, the chief is content that the boy has understood the omnipotent - God. With escorts, they reach
the coptic monastery from where Pyramids are only three hours travel. In the monastery, the Alchemist demonstrates the transformation of goia and distributes the four golden plates to the monk, the boy and he keeps one for himself. Besides he precautions the boy that “everything that happens once can never happen again. But everything that happens twice will surely happen a third time” (164).

From then on, the boy is left alone to travel just listening to the heart which alone could direct him towards his treasure. Bearing all these words in his mind, he slowly climbs on the dunes on a full moon day. He understands that no project is complete until its objective is achieved. He sees a scarab be( tie scuttling through the sand-an omen in Egypt that symbolizes the presence of God.

Paulo Coelho’s enchanting novel *The Alchemist* has inspired everyone of us to follow our dreams with courage. This story, dazzling in its simplicity and wisdom, is about an Andalusian shepherd boy Santiago who travels from his homeland in Spain to the Egyptian desert in search of treasure buried in the Pyramids. It is an exciting novel that tells us that everything is possible as long as we really want it to happen. That may sound like an oversimplified version of new-age philosophy and mysticism but as Coelho states “simple things are the most valuable and only wise people appreciate them” (<http://sophomore, hiram.edu/reading/books review. html>). *The Alchemist* teaches the shepherd and the readers that following one’s dreams, listening to one’s heart, living in the present and risking what we have to pursue in future, will enable one to find his goal. At many times along the way, the young shepherd’s search seems foolhardy and certain to be doomed but he keeps his dreams alive and the crucial meeting with an Alchemist in the desert brings his search to a climax.
The protagonist Santiago starts his journey as a child’s play. Grazing the sheep, escorting them and providing a secure and comfortable lifestyle, shearing once in a year for his survival are the routine activities of Santiago. What changes his lifestyle is his recurrent dream and his meeting with a Gypsy woman and the man who calls himself king Melchizedek and an Alchemist, all of whom direct Santiago in his quest. At first he voluntarily expresses his dream to the old woman who interprets it to him thereby directing him towards a strange place, Egypt, since he has been told by a small child in his dream that if he visits the Pyramids in Egypt, he can find his treasure. The old woman instigates that the treasure would make him a rich man. Though fascinated, the Andalusian shepherd Santiago ignores it for fear of taking risk. The first thing that mystifies the boy is his recurrent dream. The second thing is his meeting with the old king. It is true that the whole of humankind desperately wants to believe the old king when he says that the greatest lie in the world is that at some point we lose the ability to control our lives and become the pawns of fate.

In this novel the old king can be considered God’s messenger for possessing splendid knowledge. He says that everyone realizes his destiny when he is young. Yet a mysterious force persuades him that it is an impossible one; though the force being negative, it helps to realize one’s destiny and prepare his spirit as well as will power to achieve it. Everyone has a mission on earth which may differ from person to person. “To realize one’s destiny is a person’s only obligation” (23). In order to fulfil one’s destiny, “all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it” (23). This is the core of the novel’s philosophy and a motif that echoes behind Coelho’s writing all through the novel (Book Review The Alchemist 2008 <http://sophomore.hiram.edu/reading/books review. html>). The old man gives him special stones, tells him to read the omens he sees and walks away. So begins the mysterious journey of
Santiago, which directs him across the Gibraltar strait through the Sahara, to the Egyptian Pyramids. By entitling the novel as *The Alchemist*, Coelho not only projects the transformation of metals but also the shepherd boy’s self-understanding and spiritual enlightenment. “Everything on earth is being continuously transformed, because the earth is alive…. and it has a soul. We are part of that soul, so we rarely recognize that it is working for us” (82).

The soul of the earth controls the universe and every individual is a part of the soul which we seldom identify. Since Santiago attempts to learn everything, he also wishes to know something about the masterwork of alchemy - the Elixirs of life and the Philosopher’s stone. But he is not attracted towards it due to its obscure language. By the time they reach the Oasis, the serenity, the stars and the endless rows of date palms fascinate him. He feels as if the day is blessed by God with the grand festival of nature. It looks like a good sign to him.

In this novel, Coelho has employed mysticism throughout that could be perceived even from trivial instances like the omens, the language of the Universe and the process of alchemy etc. After listening to “the signs”, the boy ventures in a journey of exploration and self-discovery, symbolically searching for a hidden treasure. It is the kind of novel that reinforces that everything is possible as long as the person really wants it to happen. Coelho lays great stress on good omens throughout the novel and his protagonist unlearns that those who read most are not necessarily great observers and that it is the observation that man can learn which books fail to teach. Coelho writes “simple things are the most valuable and only wise people appreciate them” (*Book Review The Alchemist* 2007 <http://www.Merinews.com>).
Omens are a language, it’s the alphabet we develop to speak to the world’s soul or the universe’s or God’s, whatever name you want to give it. Like an alphabet it is individual, you only learn it by making mistakes and that keeps you from globalizing the spiritual quest.

*(Paulo Coelho Confessions of a Pilgrim 06)*

But the significance of a mystic experience is revealed towards the climax of the novel when Santiago is mistaken for a spy by the chief of the desert and is subjected to vindicate himself. The concluding part of the book is quite painful to go through where the shepherd talks with sand, wind and sun. He is said to have the capability to transform himself into wind. Aided by the natural sources, the transformation takes place. Standing on the top of the cliff, he recalls his experiences. He teaches the desert about love since it is unaware of the concept. Santiago says that love is everything that makes the universe alive. To the falcon, the desert is a green field to which the falcon always returns with game. Like a cyclic process, the desert feeds the falcon, the falcon feeds the man and man, in turn, feeds the desert. All this is owing to love.

Yes, that’s what love is. It’s what makes the game become the falcon, the falcon become man and man, in his turn, the desert. It’s what turns lead into gold and makes the gold return to the earth. (152)

Despite his explanation, the desert is unable to understand. So it offers to help him by blowing the wind. Then the wind touches the boy. The wind does not have any birthplace, so it knows everything including the boy’s conversation with the desert. It has several names according to his intensity - simum, sirocco, levanter and
so on. The shepherd pleads with the wind to help him to get united with his woman. As Coelho explains, when we love, we always try to improve ourselves and that’s when everything is possible. The subject of love inspires a beautiful lyricism in Coelho’s writing: “I love you because the whole universe conspired for me to come close to you” (160). Santiago persuades the wind that his travel has gained him knowledge about the wind, the deserts, the oceans, the stars and everything in the universe.

We were all made by the same hand, and we have the same soul. I want to be like you, able to reach every corner of the world, cross the seas, blow away the sands that cover my treasure, and carry the choice of the woman I love. (154)

He demands the wind to transform him into wind just for few moments so that they “can talk about the limitless possibilities of people and the winds” (154). This is like a challenge to the wind. So far it has felt that it knows everything and is limitless. But here is a boy testing its force. When the wind is close to grant what he has requested, the boy adds fuel to it by saying about the merits of love.

When you are loved, you can do anything in creation.
When you are loved, there’s no need at all to understand what’s happening, because everything happens within you and even men can turn themselves into the wind. As long as the wind helps, of course.

(155)
Being irritated by the comments of the boy, the wind blows harder and harder raising the sands of the desert. It even threatens the men and animals of the desert. The wind suggests to the boy that he should ask the heaven for help. So the boy requests the wind to blot out the sun whose rays are brilliant enough to blind one. The force of the wind fills the sky with sand. Having seen the sun, the boy enquires about love. The sun replies that he not only knows about love but also about the creation. The sun says that everything in this universe has its own function. There would be a symphony of peace if God has stopped his work of creation on the fifth day. Whereas Santiago stresses the importance of the sixth day without which there would not have been any meaning and the existence of human being. If there has not been the existence of human being, everything would have remained as it was.

You are wise, because you observe everything from a distance. But you don’t know about love. If there had not been a sixth day, man would not exist. Copper would always be just copper and lead just lead. It’s true that everything has its destiny. But one day that destiny will be realized. So each thing has to transform itself into something better and to acquire a new destiny until, someday, the soul of the world becomes one thing only.

(158)

He further quotes alchemy. Everyone searches for their treasure and after finding it they want to make it better. When we try to make the thing better, ultimately everything around us becomes better. All the days the sun has observed the world from a distance. He has brought the desert and the wind under his control which is in no way called love because “love is the force that transforms and improves the soul of
the world” (158). At this conversation, the wind is so elated to know that even the sun has its limits. In merry, it blows harder than ever. The boy senses an absolute silence when he begins to pray as his heart is filled with a current of love. The prayer seems exclusive to Santiago for it does not have words or pleas. His prayer does not include his sheep, crystal or his lady love. It is a prayer filled with only silence that enables the boy to understand the signs written by the hand. Out of this he understands that nothing other than “the hand of God could perform miracles or transform the sea into a desert or a man into the wind” (160).

Because only the hand understood that it was a larger design that had moved the Universe to the point at which six days of creation had evolved into a Master work. (160)

Through the soul of the world, Santiago has understood that the soul of the world is part of the soul of God. Consequently his soul is the soul of God that could perform miracles. It is essential to remember one of Paulo Coelho’s quotations at this moment. He says, “You have to take risks. We will only understand the miracle of life fully when we allow the unexpected to happen” (Quotes by Paulo Coelho <http://galenet.galegroup.com>). Here Santiago makes possible what is humanly impossible. Without the least idea of transforming himself to wind, he approaches the natural sources. To his surprise, he seems to gain confidence through his efforts. Thus the wind simum increases its speed almost destroying the military camp itself. Then suddenly, the simum ceases to blow. To everyone’s astonishment, the boy is now standing next to a sand-covered sentinel rather than on the top of the cliff. Except the Alchemist and the chief, all the others are terrified at this marvel. The
Alchemist is happy that he has had a perfect disciple and the chief is satisfied that the
disciple has understood the glory of God and he bids them farewell.

Santiago’s struggle to follow his dream does not end here. It continues further
when he approaches the Pyramids which are almost close to him. “Everything that
happens once can never happen again. But everything that happens twice will surely
happen a third time” (164). With this warning given by the Alchemist regarding the
gold pieces that he has with him, he travels alone towards the Pyramids. Santiago is
accompanied only by his heart. So he pays keen attention to it remembering the
words of the Alchemist. On reaching the top of the dune, he is dumb-struck at the
majestic Pyramids of Egypt, glowing by the moonlight and the brightness of the
desert. He has become inexpressive and so weeps a lot thanking God for being kind
in helping him find his treasure (destiny). Yet he has not achieved his treasure. He
finds a scarab beetle, scuttling through the sand which is considered a symbol of God.
He starts digging and digs throughout the night. Rocks after rocks he digs with heavy
limbs. At that time, several figures emerge and suspect him of trying to hide
something. They wound him severely and snatch the gold piece. What Santiago has
learnt out of his toilsome journey is that “When a person really desires something, all
the universe conspires in helping him to realize his dream” (120). Later he discloses
the reason for his search. At this one of the men advises him to return to his place for
he too has had many dreams with the signs very similar to that of Santiago like a
sycamore and the ruined sacristy.
I was told that if I dig at the roots of a sycamore, I would find a hidden treasure. But I’m not as stupid as to cross an entire desert just because of a recurrent dream. (172)

Santiago’s face brightens in joy as if he has unveiled the mystery. He rushes back to the abandoned church where he had started his journey. Having dug at the base of the sycamore, he takes out a chest of Spanish gold coins, precious stones, gold masks adorned with feathers. Though the persons he has come across have already known about the treasure, they did not reveal it to him. Because if it has been made known to him, he would not have risked locating the majestic Pyramids. Also his struggle and torments have made him view the treasure as a treasure rather than a profitable material. Gold is tested under fire, similarly Santiago’s curiosity and patience have been tested and his soul, as a final process, is polished in such a way so as to grasp the language of the world- the omens. The final step of Santiago’s spiritual journey is therefore not accomplished through speaking, but through listening. The twist at the story’s end is that the treasure is always near Santiago after all- reinforces the teachings of the Alchemist. Just as the Alchemist insists that the secrets he holds are in fact simple and easy to understand, so too is the treasure always at home. Thus, the secrets to live a happier, more fulfilled life are not far away or exotic: they are quite often right in front of us, right under our noses. The rub is that often we must travel far and wide in order to realize this.

In this age of angel sightings, angel occurrences are happening with intense frequency. It is as if God is sending his messengers with a message and that message is love. The novel The Valkyries is autobiographical but narrated from the third
person point of view. It deals with exorcism of personal demons and discovering one’s strength. It also deals with relationships between people, in this case, Paulo Coelho and his wife. The plot involves Coelho going to the Mojave desert to meet the Valkyries, a group of warrior women who travel the desert on motorcycles. At the beginning of the story, J, Coelho’s master in RAM, shows him a copy of the poem by Wilde that says “We destroy what we love” (Paulo Coelho’s Collection 7 books \& kbpsceps. batchmates. com/bm times/content, aspx? content id=1803/). This theme is central to the story. The Alchemist of Coelho is a quest for treasure in the deserts where the protagonist acquires various experiences of life whereas The Valkyries is a quest through desert to encounter the angels. The quest begins from the Mojave desert and gets over at the top of Glorieta Canyon. It is a compelling account of his journey, as Coelho, the protagonist and his wife embark on a forty day quest into the searing heat of the Mojave desert, where they encounter the Valkyries, the strange warrior women who travel through the desert on motorcycles. It is highly autobiographical for the author has narrated his own experience in detail.

The novel opens with Coelho’s meeting with J-his master who is none other than a man whom Coelho had met in his real life. They both discuss magic, women etc., giving a hint to the readers about what is going to happen. While they are discussing the other things, the protagonist presents his original as well as unpublished copy of The Alchemist to his master J. He appreciates him for his perfect rendering of certain secrets of alchemy. Later on, J assigns a task to Coelho. A task to break the curse for the sake of love, victory and the glory of God. The curse that makes us kill the best thing God offers us, which makes us turn our faces away from the things we love the most. In the midst, J also mentions Chris, wife of Coelho, who would be accompanying Coelho in his quest. Accordingly, Coelho leaves with his
wife without knowing where exactly they are going. All he knows is that he has to find a person named Gene in USA somewhere in the Californian desert. Chris accompanies her husband without the slightest interest in angels yet enduring Coelho’s unpredictable moods praying secretly for him to see his angel. They travel nearly for six hours with confidence that they are in the right path often verifying the map. At times Chris reminisces on her life with Coelho who has once been termed as a sorcerer by her friends. Coelho had learned magic for seven years and has had a vision of J who reforms him. They arrive at Mojave desert. He shares his mystical experience with Chris. There are certain moments when he feels as if he is being keenly observed by someone whom he comprehends to be his angel.

Chris’ spiritual journey starts soon after her meeting with Gene who is just in his twenties. She is astounded at the knowledge and experience of Gene on the mystical plane. As instructed by his angel, Gene teaches Coelho through Chris. There with Gene she learns how to master her second mind. It is something beyond our control. It could be some melody which keeps flowing while one is thinking of something important. Coelho takes Chris for a stroll in a salt lake in the desert to train her to look at the horizon. The lake which appeared to be near at first seems to move farther as they walk towards it. So having felt frustrated they decide to return. While doing so, their exhaustion takes them to the extent of ripping their clothes as the temperature intensifies. They become fatigued, they lie down to rest a while not bothering about whomever passes them by. When their endurance crosses the limit fortunately a man in a truck, after inspecting their car, looks for them in the desert. All the while, despite the scorching sun, Chris enjoys a feeling of euphoria. She is of the opinion that only in such a serene atmosphere angels appear. She feels as if her soul has grown. Coelho, not realizing that the man is actually one of the messengers
of God being sent at an exact time to rescue them, hopes to meet his angel soon. To their surprise they find themselves in the old trailer accompanied by Gene. Once again they are taken to the top of the cliff where Gene first met his angel. He brings their mind back to concentration and explains every one’s contact with four different entities in the invisible world: the elementals, the disembodied spirit, the saints and the angels. Since Coelho is a Magus, it is implied that Gene’s talk on the elementals, the disembodied spirits is directed towards Chris, the amateur. Coelho understands that Gene uses Chris as an instrument through which he himself can progress. The first lesson of Gene to Chris is to invoke the saints who would appear after the disembodied spirits. When they are near, undoubtedly the angels would appear. Gene, then advises Coelho to seek out the Valkyries and adds that his meeting with them would fruitfully help him to get at his angel. And so they set out in search of the Valkyries.

In the meantime, Coelho teaches Chris the channelling, the fourth process to converse with her angel. Channelling is nothing but paying attention to the thoughts that emerge freely from the bottom of one’s mind. In the course of channelling, Chris is allowed to speak as she pleases. She makes strange noises, utters something ridiculous and says a prayer of Ojibway Shamans. Chris comes in contact with her angel sooner than they had expected. Due to this, their marital life seems to reach its sour ends. While they are refreshing in a small diner next to the gas station, they hear a roaring sound of a truck and the Valkyries enter the diner. They are women in black leather raiments with gloves and colourful bandannas, riding their powerful motorcycles. They are all ordinary human beings possessing profound mystical powers who symbolize both inebriation of courage and rest for the warrior, the adventure of love in battle. They are eight in number and the oldest of them is named Valhalla who recognizes Coelho as a Magus. She, accordingly approaches him.
Having got a glimpse of Coelho’s ring, she asks him about it in their code language.
Then Coelho makes his appeal to her. To meet one’s angel, three things are necessary: break a pact, accept forgiveness and make a bet. After all, the most important aspect is a woman’s courage rather than a man’s. Valhalla consents to help him. Chris utilizes the mean time to collect details about the Valkyries. At noon they meet Valhalla where Chris’ courage is being tested before she pursues her spiritual path. Then they enter the strange door in the mountain preceded by Valhalla. Initially, Coelho is asked to break the pact. He breaks his pact that has been made fourteen years ago. Insolence is the price paid by Coelho for his Salvation from evil. His intense prayer brushes aside the presence of evil eventually. As days pass by, Coelho’s life becomes smooth and so he begins to fancy his dream thereby breaking his pact. Valhalla instructs him to swear on the Archangel Michael that never again in his life he would betray his ownself.

Then Valhalla takes Coelho to the Death Valley to enable him perform the forgiveness ritual. This ritual is otherwise known as the ritual that demolishes rituals which stir hatred between Coelho, a warrior and Rotha, the prisoner. Coelho attacks Rotha vehemently with the belt to extract the secret of seeing his angel. When she refuses, Coelho’s hatred is stirred and it permeates through the warrior’s heart. Coelho becomes furious at the same time awaits Rotha to beg for his forgiveness. In an unexpected moment, Chris who has been observing the rituals is transformed into a stronger woman like Valhalla while Valhalla takes up Chris’ position. They both fight for Coelho now. The last ritual is making a bet which has been left at the efforts of Coelho himself. He feels forsaken by his angel. With only six days left behind, his conscience asks him if he is growing greedy for the earth that produces enough to satisfy one’s needs. During the sunset, they begin their channelling activity named contemplation of the angel. Before the activity, Chris fires a volley of questions at
him to know the reason for his craze to meet his angel. Coelho answers her questions comparing J, Chris and himself to a farmer, a hunter and vice versa. Chris feels that the hunt that she has learnt has made her soul grow as well as speak with her angel. During their channelling, she obeys the second mind thereby agreeing to abandon her husband. Soon she realizes the presence of her angel. The next day, he sets out in the early hours to meet his angel in Glorieta Canyon. The dawn for him appears to be the face of his guardian angel who has been in his proximity. While he is obsessed with the thoughts of the desert, a blue butterfly flutters around him symbolizing his angel. As a result his angel also reveals its countenance like a streak of light on the horizon. On a sudden impulse, he writes a few verses dictated by a voice.

“And an angel descended where they were and the glory of the lord shone all about them” (Luke 2:9). Thus begins the novel The Valkyries which not only gives a clue but also a mystical insight into the novel. The protagonist and his wife undertake a forty day journey through the desert seeking their guardian angel with the help of messengers like Gene, Valkyries etc. In his quest to speak with angels, Paulo Coelho indulges himself by heading out to California to the Mojave desert, where he will meet a boy named Gene, who can help him try to find out the way he could learn to speak with his angel (Paulo Coelho’s The Valkyries-A Review: A Meeting with Angels and The Self <http://latin - american literature, suite 101. com/article, cfm/article. cfm/paulo - coelhos - the - valkyries - a - review#>). Their manner of meeting their guardian angel itself mystifies them. While Coelho is a master of meditation, Chris is just an amateur to this field. During their walk through the Mojave desert, Coelho remarks that he has felt as if his activities are being keenly observed by someone whom he comprehends to be his angel. He has had such experiences many times, which is common to all in certain circumstance.
I just know there are moments when, without really knowing it, we are aware of the presence of angels. At such moments we begin to create a kind of film in which we are the main character and we are certain that someone is observing our action. (20)

Coelho reports it to be “angels that is God’s messengers” (20). The real Coelho is human and full of his own questions. His knowledge of the desert is questioned when he and his wife set out on a long walk through the mysterious sand dunes. They set themselves free letting their nude bodies be devoured by the scorching sun. Though the journey has been initiated by Coelho, it is Chris who meets her angel first. Gene teaches her the exercise of controlling her second mind. The second mind is a totally unknown fact for Chris. Suspense builds when Christina first learns to quieten her second mind and figures out how to talk with her angel, before Coelho does. When she is relaxed, she realizes that she has been singing for long and incessantly an unknown melody. The couple’s mystical experience reaches the peak on meeting the Valkyries, without whose help Coelho could not meet his angel. Their very appearance mystifies Coelho and Chris.

They are women in black leather with colourful bandannas riding their powerful motorcycles. It is believed that they possess profound mystical powers symbolizing both inebriation of courage and rest for the warrior, the adventure of love in battle. The Valkyries take them on a journey of forgiveness and the pacts that one must make before being able to re-unite with one’s angels. Valhalla takes Coelho and Chris to a mountain to break a pact and offers Chris a Medallion portraying Archangel Michael. The Medallion that Coelho holds, helps him to recall his sinful past. Coelho
with his girlfriend has an exchange with God some fourteen years ago when they have been badly tormented by the presence of evil due to his concern towards the alternative society. He makes effort to divert his mind but in vain.

The intervals between bouts of dizziness were growing shorter and shorter and everything was turning black again. He knew - something was telling him - that he could not let that feeling take him over. Something terrible might happen - he might enter into that darkness and never return. He had to maintain control at any cost - he needed to occupy his mind or that thing would dominate him. (121)

The same thing is sensed by his girlfriend too due to her participation in the rituals. She states “something strange is happening. You know what it is, help me!” (121). They try on many other things surrounding them to distract their minds from “that” gloominess. Finally, to brush aside the evil, they pay their entire attention to “running water” (125). Since they believe “running water keeps the evil away” (125). He goes on to the extreme of offering everything inclusive of his dream only for the salvation of their soul. Coelho feels humiliated in front of a woman whom he has struggled to impress all these days. Yet his insolence has been the price for his salvation. At that point he is even ready to accept that insolence.

‘Lord, I believe, help me in my incredulity’ he repeated.

‘we want to make an exchange. We offer you anything absolutely anything in return for the salvation of our
souls. We offer our lives or everything we own, please accept, my lord’. (128)

Suddenly “the dizziness, the black hole, the laughter and the noises” (129) vanish as an answer to their prayer. Coelho realizes the presence of divinity. Since the spiritual search is made up of many beginnings, the Valhalla moves on to the next ritual called as ritual that demolishes rituals to enable Coelho to accept forgiveness by provoking him and kindling his hatred. This is something like a battle between Coelho and Rotha. In the ritual, Coelho is identified as a warrior who, being victorious in the battle, punishes Rotha, the prisoner who has been defeated. This takes place at a tall rock known as the sacred theatre for the ritual.

[...] in his mind, Paulo created the walls of the castle.
From that moment on, the ravine, the Valkyries, Chris, Valhalla and everything else ceased to be of importance. (170)

To extract the secret of his angel from Rotha, Coelho torments her savagely,

No, I won’t tell you about the angels - says Rotha, the warrior’s eyes changed and she was delighted. He would show no mercy. The only thing that frightened her was that the warrior might be governed by the rule of morality [...]. (174)
As the torture worsens, she pleads for forgiveness which is accordingly accepted by Coelho. The only ritual that remains is making a bet. Rightly said by Coelho, “the spiritual search matters the will to go on” (245). Almost depressed, Coelho with his wife travels further with only six days left.

The next day Coelho meets his angel and so sets out alone in the small hours in Glorieta Canyon. While he is contemplating on the dawn and is obsessed with the beauty of the dawn, his angel appears in a quite unexpected time in the form of a blue butterfly that flutters around him. Soon he is reminded of his bet being made on the mountain the previous night.

I bet all of my faith in God, in life, in my work, in J, I bet everything I had. I bet that when I opened my eyes, you would show yourself to me. I place my entire life on one tray of the scales. I asked that you place your countenance on the other. (227)

The moment he opens his eyes, a streak of light appears on the horizon with the arrival of the sun. He hears a voice whispering.

Look around, this is my face. I’m the place where you are. My mantle will cover you with the rays of the Sun in daytime and with the glow of the star at night. (227)

Consequently, he is instructed to write some verses which are being dictated by a voice and that looks like a message to someone. Coelho is utterly mystified at this. Then as if responding positively to his sign, the butterfly lands on his left hand.
“he kept absolutely still, because he was in the presence of another miracle. His angel had responded” (231).

An absolute shock takes possession of Coelho as his angel responds positively. A golden arm from within the ground implies something to him. Finally as a witness, Coelho erects the image of Our Lady on the top of a boulder as a mark of their visit wishing it to be his sacred place and a place of power. What is astonishingly mystifying is the epilogue of *The Valkyries*. One would doubt whether this could have happened but Coelho has substantiated it. A year and a half later, one afternoon when Coelho is being interviewed by his Brazilian reader Rita de Freitas, he advises her to call at Canyon near Borrego Springs to see if the statue of Our Lady of Aparecida still remains.

In 1989, before Christmas Coelho receives yet another letter from Rita telling about her visit to Glorieta Canyon. The Brazilian reader mentions that at first she is disappointed to see no sign of the image on the boulder but during their return trip on the third day of thanks giving, they have been enticed by a bunch of flowers amidst the rocks where the statue has been decorated by a woman clad in white appearing suddenly in the middle of the desert.

Very strange- how could a woman such as this appear out of nowhere in the middle of the desert? [...] I wondered how she could have come there with no car to be seen. But I was so surprised and I couldn’t bring myself to talk to her. (238)
is the mystical climax of Coelho’s journey. It is really surprising that while the protagonists, in other novels, set on a journey for various other reasons which end in spiritual realization, Coelho’s attempt in *The Valkyries* is sheerly to confront his guardian angel. Throughout the journey, Coelho fights his inner demons and works towards spiritual enlightenment and self-development having three concepts as his prime factors- break a pact, accept forgiveness and make a bet. This, in short, is a journey of faith, of trust, of forgiveness, of love, of self- discovery, and of battling the darkness within ourselves, and wanting to change. Faith is a different conquest and it requires daily combat in order to be maintained- is obviously revealed by Coelho in this novel.

*Eleven Minutes* is an exceptional novel of the author which delivers a new vista of perception to the readers. In all other novels, Coelho has used a special but a known area for his quest. In *Zahir*, the protagonist’s search for his wife; in *The Pilgrimage* the road to Santiago, in *The Alchemist* the desert, in *The Witch of Portobello* spirituality through the unrhythmic dance, in *The Valkyries* the angels through channelling or contemplation. In all these novels, the prime character or characters acquire peculiar knowledge which lays foundation for their quest. On the contrary, sexuality lays ground for the protagonist’s spiritual quest in *Eleven Minutes*. To attain divinity through sexuality is the focus of the novel. The protagonist of this novel, Maria seeks sublime heights through agony. In the process, she comes to know that agony and ecstasy are inseparable. In this novel, biographical aspects are interwoven subtly with imagination. For most of the experiences shared by the protagonist Maria are biographical. The story is about a young Brazilian girl Maria. The protagonist in her adolescence with all the dreams of her age later becomes a prostitute in Switzerland in search of true love. She constantly remembers a boy who asks for a pencil when they are young but she decides not to talk to him. The boy,
however, does not ask her again which makes her regret her denial for the rest of her life. At a tender age, she persuades herself that she will never find honest love. She cultivates the habit of writing a diary describing her humdrum life, her desire to achieve luxuries and the things she has experienced. Her dream is to earn more money, lead a sophisticated life, marry a charming person, bear children and live in a house with a sea view. But at every step, something goes wrong and she ends in failure and frustration. She plans to fulfil her dream or call it a desire partly. She tours Rio de Janeiro. There she meets a Portuguesian accompanied by Mailson, an interpreter - cum - security officer who takes her to Switzerland to be a prostitute. She has set a goal to lead luxurious and sophisticated life. She quests for the means through which she can earn money.

In Europe, initially Maria begins her profession as a samba dancer in a night club as per the guidance of Vivian, a young Brazilian woman. Though she feels humiliated amidst the drunken customers blowing kisses and making obscene gestures, her flight from there would be devoid of meaning. She becomes resigned to such a plight simply to enjoy the luxury. For the same she never feels the ache of dancing for seven nights a week maintaining a fixed smile on her face to please the customers. It has been learnt from her diary that she has left the choice to her own self either to be a victim of the world or an adventurer in search of treasure since the stream of life differs according to our approach. Instead of becoming a slave to the circumstance, Maria prefers to risk her life in search of treasure and walk out to her hometown victoriously. In her profession as a samba dancer, she begins to learn how to tackle the situation of earning adequately. Every profession has its own problem.
Obviously hitherto Maria has equipped herself in order to overcome the hindrances present in her samba dancing. To her misery, she falls in love with an Arab due to which she is dismissed by Roger, the owner of the club. It is at this juncture, Maria becomes a prostitute. At every juncture of her life, she learns something peculiar about life. She goes to a lending library to make her time worth spending by reading fairy tales. Suddenly one day, she receives a phone call from a model agency offering her a part in a fashion show. It is the first time she is paid for her virginity. Since then it has become quite casual with her. Inspite of the suffering that she undergoes, she learns keenly about sex to make her clients feel that ecstasy. Inevitably her conscience keeps on tormenting her for disgraceful activity. She becomes a specialist in her job by probing the mysterious aspects of it. Like the other jobs, she is also instructed about the limitations and is being guided by Milan in Copacabana and her co-dancers. Now she has become mature enough to make decisions on her own. She often visits the library and eventually befriends the librarian who later shares a lot of things with her. Maria thinks of going back to Brazil several times but retreats from it due to her vaulting dream of making herself rich and helping her family too. In the course of time, Maria faces many twists and turns of life. At one point, she realizes that except for a few, most of the men, approach her to release their tension and pressure of their work. Feeling lonely, they expect someone to talk to rather than for mere sex. In this regard, Maria can be called a social worker for she goes in search of books pertaining to marital problems, human emotions, psychology and even politics in order to counsel her clients aptly.

The most striking aspect of this novel is its title Eleven Minutes. Through Maria’s calculation, Coelho says that its only for that eleven minutes orgasm, people get entangled in marital bond, bearing children and caring for them, breaking their
heads in their job, lacking peace, satisfaction and feeling lonely etc. Maria categorizes men as the exterminators, the pretty woman type, the God father type. During her stroll in the streets of Geneva, she comes across the road to Santiago. It possesses a realistic aspect that is, the road to Santiago passes through Geneva and the symbolic aspect behind it is that from that moment on, Maria’s body and soul begin to become reintegrated, because of love. She meets Ralf Hart, a painter in a restaurant. He is impressed by the inner glow of Maria. This is the point that Maria’s spiritual quest begins. Amidst men, Ralf Hart is the only person to see the soul. As Maria has categorized men, she also compartmentalises her ownself as the innocent girl, the femme fatale and the understanding mother, depending on her clients.

As a result of their meeting, Maria’s lake-like heart is rocked by the pebble like passion being thrown by Ralf Hart. She falls in love with him. When she is in confusion whether to return to Brazil or to make money in Geneva, the painter’s call appears as if that of God’s. Their first meeting makes it possible for her to see her own special light. Another turning point of her life is Terence, as in The Valkyries, where Rotha’s self is purified by constant humiliations, here also Maria enjoys pleasure through humiliations and punishments. Once again, she meets Ralf who gives a very polished message on creation of man and woman and furthermore about sex. Ralf looks out for something totally different, and that he finds his passion and solace in Maria who is so lambasted by the mainstream and the system. Artists go looking for their daily inspiration in all the so-called mysterious places. Ralf Hart’s positive force promises pleasure and satisfaction to Maria that leads her to enlightenment. Coelho is definitely a master in blending the reality with mysticism which seems disintegrate in his novels. Although thousands of books have been
written over the subject “sex”, *Eleven Minutes* explores the other side of sexual life, which is unknown to major portion of the population.

To Coelho, orgasm and the joy of sex apparently are the gates to the ultimate symbolic union with the divine. That divinity is possible only when he or she undergoes extreme pain and suffering. Moreover, the author suggests that when a woman’s friendly pain reaches its limit, it gives salvation. While Terence’s is that of pleasure, Ralf’s is that of peace. In certain episodes, Coelho portrays the typical Indian features of women regarding their love and marital life. Maria’s diary implicits her eventual change of temperament where initially she mentioned about her frustrations in love but later on seeing Ralf hart, she realizes the blooming of true love in her heart which gradually attains divinity despite her profession. A sermon given in one of the protestant churches converts her mind that she decides to leave for Brazil thanking the vicar finally. Apart from all other themes that are prevalent in the novel, there is also a thin stream of love sentiment pervading implicitly and unhurriedly throughout the novel between Maria and Ralf who arrive to sense the holiness of sex.

In this gripping and daring novel, Paulo Coelho sensitively explores the sacred nature of sex and love and invites us to confront our own prejudices and demons and embrace our own inner light. The exclusive feature of the novel *Eleven Minutes* is sex which is used as a means for quest and the experiences shared by the protagonist Maria mystify her there by making sex a sacred one. Maria is a young girl from a Brazilian village, filled with dreams of the tender age- finding a prince, loving him truly, getting married to him, bearing children and leading a contented life in a lovely house with a sea view. The very first boy whom she has dreamt of could be her
charming prince, fails to reciprocate her love. This love wanes with the school holidays. His absence disturbs her severely. Unable to bear the first failure, she goes to Virgin Mary for solace. She arrives at a decision that love is something very dangerous.

The world was too large, that love was something very dangerous and that the virgin was a saint who inhabited a distant heaven and didn’t listen to the prayers of children. (5)

Maria cultivates a habit of writing everyday’s events in her diary. Again she encounters a boy in a holy week procession, falls in love, goes out with him for a stroll but in the shortest period, he shifts his love to a friend of Maria which terribly upsets her. Her diary says

When we meet someone and fall in love, we have a sense that the whole universe is on our side. I saw this happen today [...] and yet if something goes wrong, there is nothing left! no herons, no distant music, not even the taste of his lips. How is it possible for the beauty that was there only minutes before to vanish so quickly? Life moves very fast. It rushes us from heaven to hell in a matter of seconds. (9)

Once for all she decides never to love anyone for “love is, above all, a cause of suffering” (11). She decides to become a nun, devoting the rest of her life to a kind of love that doesnot hurt, not even leaves painful scars on her heart - love for Jesus.
Having lost her virginity to yet another boy in her effort to understand love, she loses hope on men. She understands that love is a lame reason that men use for their weakness. Love, the tender concept itself is termed as “marvellous, murderous thing” (16) by Maria.

[...] but now I think it’s just the way men are.

Although my aim is to understand love, and although I suffer to think of the people to whom I gave my heart, I see that those who touched my heart failed to arouse my body and that those who aroused my body failed to touch my heart. (16)

At the age of 19, she becomes more cautious about men bearing in mind “beauty, my dear, doesn’t last” (17), the words of her mother. She learns how to handle men without being used by them. Having reached sublime heights through agony in sex, she perceives that agony and ecstasy are inseparable, from finding an honest love, she switches her mind over to lead a contented life by earning more money. But in every phase, something obstructs her efforts and as a result, it ends in frustrations. With a ransom earned from a draper’s shop, she desires to tour Rio de Janeiro. Misfortune awaits her in the name of Mailson - a Portuguese interpreter-cum-security officer who tempts Maria into becoming a samba dancer at a night club. She has been charmed by the luxuries provided to her in Rio-her new dresses, the beautiful shoes and that rendezvous on the beach - all these things are recorded in her diary. With a slight guilty conscience, she writes “everything tells me that I am about to make a wrong decision but making mistakes is just part of life. What does the
world want of me?” (25). She quests for the means through which she can earn money. She goes to the extent of taking any risk.

The little experience of life I’ve had has taught me that no one owns anything that everything is an illusion and that applies to material as well as spiritual things [...]. If nothing belongs to me, then there’s no point wasting my time looking after things that aren’t mine. (26)

Another opportunity from a big French impresario takes her to Paris. In her profession as a samba star, she has to withstand the humiliation of dancing in the midst of drunken customers making awkward gestures and blowing kisses. Vivian is a young Brazilian who often advises her about her behaviour in the night club. To enjoy the luxury, she never feels the ache of dancing for seven nights. This has been exploited by some perverts of the society. Though her life is in the midst of insolence, she does not dare to go back because of her determination to accumulate money and walk out to her home town victoriously.

No, I can’t go back like that, I’d rather throw myself out of the plane as it’s crossing the ocean since you can’t open the windows in the plane I will die here, but before I die, I want to fight for life. If I can walk on my own I can go wherever I like. (43)

She drifts between being a victim of the world and an adventurer in search of treasure. Bravely she dares to risk her life to find the treasure instead of giving herself up to the circumstances. Despite the hardships in her profession, she overcomes it and attains popularity among the samba dancers. To her misery, she,
inspite of her decision, falls in love with an Arab which hinders her hitherto smooth life. Roger- the owner of the club, dismisses her. It is at this juncture, Maria turns out to be a prostitute in France. She decides to do justice to her job. So she endeavours to know what interests men in sexuality, the reason for seeking it out of their home and the means through which she can satisfy their needs. She borrows books from the library. One day she receives a call to perform in a fashion show for a model agency who has consented to pay for her virginity for the first time. Ever since then things like these have become quite common in her life. She pays more attention on how to make her clients feel that ecstasy despite her suffering. She asks to herself.

[...] what have I got to lose if I decide to become a prostitute for a while? Honour, dignity, self-respect. Although when I think about it, I’ve never had any of those things. I didn’t ask to be born, I’ve never found anyone to love me, I’ve always made the wrong decisions- now I’m letting life decide for me. (64)

All that she has to learn in this job is how to behave, how to give pleasure and receive money in turn. Hitherto she gets an adviser Milan in Copacabana to instruct her about the limitations. Despite her conscience, she becomes an expert in her job by probing into the mysterious aspects of it. In the beginning, as is termed by Paulo Coelho, it is “the beginner’s luck” (73), she earns more than her expectation. Having satiated with earning, now she concentrates only on satisfying the souls of the clients. By this time, she has become mature enough to make decisions on her own. Visiting the library and borrowing books on sex become frequent. She befriends the librarian who later shares a lot of things with her. Once after bidding farewell to one of her clients, she walks through the freezing cold. In a kind of trance, she thinks,
Some people were born to face life alone, and this is neither good nor bad, it is simply life. Maria is one of those people [...] life was teaching her - very fast - that only the strong survive. To be strong, she must be the best, there’s no alternative. (75)

In due course she faces the ebbs and flows of life. She realizes that except for a few, most of the men approach her to release their tension, to talk freely about their problems rather than for mere sex. More than a whore, she becomes a social worker who sets to work on the problems of her customers.

It is just for this few minutes of time, people struggle being trapped in marital bond, having children and caring for them, striving at their job, lacking peace, happiness, satisfaction and finally feeling lonely. According to the temperaments of the clients, she classifies them as “exterminators - stinking of drink, pretending not to look at anyone, the pretty woman type - appear elegant gentlemanly and affectionate pretending as if they have come into the club by chance and the last is the Godfather type - treating woman’s physique as a piece of merchandise” (91). Her prejudice on love vanishes. She understands that in love, no one can harm anyone else, each other is responsible for their feelings and none can be blamed.

I am convinced that no one loses anyone, because no one owns anyone. That is the true experience of freedom having the most important thing in the world without owning it. (92)
One may wonder how a prostitute could be truly loved by a person. This is duly answered by Paulo Coelho in his foreword. He illustrates an incident from the Bible. A woman, dubbed a sinner by the city dwellers, approaches Jesus when he is sitting at meal in the pharisee’s house, with an alabaster cruse of ointment. She washes his feet with tears, wipes them with her hair, kisses his feet and then she anoints them with the ointment which has not been done by the pharisee. This pleases Jesus and he does not stop her from doing so. However, the pharisee begins to criticise the holiness of Jesus for not preventing the woman. Illustrating them with a story, onto them, Jesus says.

Thou gavest me no kiss but she, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint but this she hath anointed my feet with ointment, wherefore I say unto thee; her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. *(Luke 7: 37 [47]*)

Similarly Maria does it not for pleasure but as a service to those who are in need, those who need a person to share their worries and relieve their stress. Moreover, she duly receives the blessings of Virgin Mary whenever she seeks it. On a stroll in the streets of Geneva which leads her to the road to Santiago, a common road for all pilgrims, she feels the divine power on it. The moment she steps on the road, Maria’s body and soul begin to become reintegrated because of love. In a restaurant, she comes into contact with Ralf Hart, a painter who sees the inner glow of Maria instead of her physical self. Some transformation takes place in Maria. She
starts her spiritual quest with Ralf Hart - the man who has recognized her soul. Maria’s innocent passion is being stimulated by Ralf Hart. Genuine love blooms between them. He voluntarily offers to portray her. His constant looks make her uncomfortable. For the first time she has been seen as a human not as a woman by a man.

He’s seeing my soul, my fears, my fragility, my inability to deal with a world which I pretend to master, but about which I know nothing. (101)

This meeting enables Maria to see her own inner light- “a special glow” (102). On that miraculous day, she writes in her diary.

Some hours before that scene, I went into a cafe, heard a voice and it was as if God had thrown a pebble into that place. The waves of energy touched both me and a man sitting in a corner painting a portrait. He felt the vibrations of that pebble and so did I (114)

When confusion arises in the mind of Maria whether to return to Brazil or to make money at Geneva, the painter’s call sounds like that of God’s. Her heart longs to love him, does not want to miss his affection “but I cannot pretend that everything is normal that it’s just a stage, a phase of my life. I want to forget it, I need to love—that’s all, I need to love” (208). Terence is another client of Maria who teaches her the divinity of sex through agony. For him pain is nothing but something that transforms itself into delight and mystery. He describes about a strange deadly disease that has taken the Europeans under control - the Black Death. They think it
as God’s punishment for mankind’s sins. So to pacify God’s wrath, the Europeans endure physical pain by walking across the bridges and beating their own bodies with whips and chains.

They were suffering in the name of God and praising
God with their pain [...] pain was no longer a cause of
suffering but a source of pleasure. (148)

Pleasure redeems humanity from its sins. Pain becomes joy, the meaning of life and pleasure. Paulo suggests that when a woman’s friendly pain reaches its limit, it gives salvation. While Terence has taught her pleasure through pain, Ralf has taught her peace through pain. What Maria has started as a profession to make money, has rendered her many mystifying experiences. Thus Paulo has affirmed that holiness or sublime heights are not only attained by the quest undertaken through common and accepted subject-matter but also through the forbidden subject-sex. Eleven Minutes does not set out to be a manual or a treatise about a man and a woman confronted by the unknown world of sexual relationships. Sex means, above all, having the courage to experience our own paradoxes, individuality, and willingness to surrender.

A simple story turning into life philosophy is the beauty of Coelho’s novels. The story of The Zahir begins with a glimpse or a passing thought and ends in obsession. The title of the novel The Zahir has several meanings. It is an eighteenth century term and its origin is Islamic. In Arabic, Zahir means visible, present, incapable of going unnoticed. It is something or someone who is known to us once or been in contact, and who gradually occupies our every thought, until we can think of nothing else. According to writer Jorge Luis Borges, it can also be considered a state of holiness or of madness. Coelho’s The Zahir discusses a celebrated author’s
feelings and stream of thoughts on the disappearance of his wife Esther - a war correspondent, winner of two international prizes for journalism, a rumour spreads that she is seen with a man in his mid 20s with dark Mongolian features named Mikhail. During a formal investigation, police arrests Esther’s husband Paulo Coelho. Later he has been released by a woman named Marie who becomes his lover in the latter part. After his release, he realizes what actually freedom means. There starts his quest for freedom. He recalls his childhood deeds from whence he has fought for freedom.

As days move on, he deserts not only his wife but also his job as a journalist and ventures as a writer. In the name of freedom, he speaks of the enslavement in human bond. In a frustrated mood, he visits all the places he has visited with his wife. Though time brings more success and new love, he remains mystified and increasingly fascinated by her absence. He determines to find her. So he keenly analyses the reason for her disappearance. Finally he suspects that she might have gone away with Mikhail though he cannot decipher the reason for the elopement. They both never interfere in each other’s affairs, at the same time they never hesitate to share their hardships. For the author, Esther is the only stimulation to become a writer. Only on her compulsion, he starts his first book The Zahir. Now Esther has become his Zahir. She occupies his whole heart, he is obsessed with thoughts of her. She has inspired him to write and further has made arrangements to publish his work like the favour bank which has been strange to the author. In between The Zahir, he publishes yet another book in April A Time to Rend and A Time to Sew, which hits the best sellers list.
Fortunately one fine day, he happens to meet Mikhail while signing books. Mikhail intends to leave a message regarding Coelho’s wife. The author thinks Mikhail is the sole person to save him and so he is cautious in talking to him. In the restaurant, they are accompanied by Maria, the new love of Coelho in the absence of Esther. Mikhail tells them about his residence at Steppes in Kazakhstan which is far bigger than France. Shortly after this meeting, the author unexpectedly finds Mikhail in one of the restaurants St. Germain - des - Pres in a trance. He is invited on to the stage eagerly by the people. He sees him telling stories - answering the questions hanging in the air. The author is reminded of his wife’s words about Mikhail - “he had magical powers” (95). He deals with all aspects of human problems. After the meeting, the author too is curious to know the reason for his wife’s disappearance. There he could see how divine energy passes through the body about which once Esther had explained to him.

Esther, unlike her husband, is more adventurous, highly interested in war and the lives of the soldiers. Later on, the author comes to know that Esther is weaving carpets and teaching French somewhere. Mikhail reveals his mission of spreading the energy of love throughout the world. He shares his experience of spirituality and the miracle. Originally he is called Oleg which he has changed to Mikhail - to be reborn. In a quiet unexpected second, Mikhail is tormented by epileptic fits which he describes, as a contact with the energy of love. During their third meeting, being inspired by others, the author also willingly narrates his personal story. Mikhail makes it a point of meeting the beggars, a group of new nomads, organizing a meeting in the American restaurant on alternate days. Since the author becomes free enough to talk, he gathers details about Esther, the situation that has brought Mikhail and Esther into contact and how he has become her interpreter in order to spread the
energy of love. Further he says that it is only due to lack of love, Esther has deserted
the author. Mikhail explains about his visions and hearing voices. He goes on
interpreting how he has heard a voice, instructing as well as guiding him in all he
does. He also advises him to abide by the voice if he is very serious in finding his
Esther. He also promises to help him with a map to locate Esther. He also quotes
Joan of Arc, the one who had also heard the voice, and had been burnt at the stake for
witchcraft.

The next day he plans to meet Mikhail soon after his appointment with an
American actor Roberto’s Pizzeria. On the pavement, to help a woman pass with her
push chair, he steps off the kerb. Admiring the architectural works of the building, he
falls down and fractures his neck. He becomes conscious at the sametime
unconscious. When he suffers an extreme pain, he apprehends some mysterious
sounds and visions that he could faintly hear and remember. As soon as he regains
his consciousness, he feels as if he is in utter darkness like being inside a coffin in an
absolute silence. So he bangs the walls to make others know that he is alive. His fear
mitigates as a light appears around him. He perceives a soft hand with an angelic face
touching him and ensuring that he is no longer in the coffin. After this incident he
begins to respect mystery. He is then obsessed with the thoughts of Esther, his Zahir.

Probing deep, he finds the reason for his wife’s disappearance that is
unexpressed love. After the accident, Coelho with a strong belief in life and love,
leaves the hospital. However, he persuades Maria regarding his search for Esther.
Mikhail narrates his personal history on their way to meeting the beggars. His father
dies as a carpet seller and his mother has brought him up amidst hard struggle.
Mikhail begins to have visions on his way back home. He sees a little girl in white
dress who answers his questions. This news spreads to everyone and they accompany
him during his prayers. To his shock, one day he is prevented from doing so by the police. Mikhail is distressed at this incident. To console him, the girl appears and assures to guide him forever. It is the voice that prophesies of his meeting with a woman (Esther) when he is 22. He lives a life for a cause - spreading the energy of love is his only mission to be fulfilled. He wanders in Steppes with the hunters who believe that he has magical powers.

Blowing of the warm wind, bright lights and going into trance - all these have become routine. The voice tells him concrete facts about what is to happen. Yet the director refuses to believe in voices and the little girl. Once when he is much worried about his indented car, the warm wind blows and the light appears. After a longtime Mikhail begins to speak in a language strange to him. This time, even after becoming normal, he feels the divine presence which reminds him of his mission - filling the world with the energy of total love. After decades, his divine powers have become common among the people. Shortly then mysticism and esoteric have become fashionable in Almaty. Even books dealing with these powers have also been published. Only at this juncture, he meets Esther who needs an interpreter. The moment he meets her, he feels the presence of the little girl. On a sign from the girl, he understands that Esther is the one for whom he has been waiting all his life and consents to help her. She then introduces herself as a journalist who has a wish to write an article about an outbreak of a war in America. At great risk, they reach the frontier. Since the war is about to break, all the roads are highly guarded. So they return immediately. On the way back, Mikhail seizes the chance to propose to her. Only then he understands that she is married. He, later, summarizes about his vision till the doctor’s diagnosis of epilepsy.
In turn she briefs him about the reason for her coming. Since she can no longer pretend to be happy in her marital life and she has found something has been missing, she has left everything and come in search of adventure. Mikhail, to divert her, takes her to a nomad who possesses magical powers. The nomad, an old man, advises Esther to keep her soul as newly born to enable the energy of love penetrate her soul. A year later she once again meets Mikhail to write an article on the disappearance of the nomads. Accompanied by Mikhail, she contacts a few tribes, local shamans and learns their Tengri tradition. By that time, she develops a remarkable skill in speaking French. They together arrive at Paris. They feel a new space being opened up around them, a mysterious feeling of joy slips in, as a result their intuition grows sharper, they become brave enough to risk things whether right or wrong. Working in a bar, he gets permission to perform an exotic kind of art once in a week to free the minds of the people. At first the voice has begun to speak through him but slowly it has made others to share their emotions which he calls as “interrupted stories”. (25)

Eventually the gathering becomes huge and this ritual becomes popular. People feel as if they are touched by the energy of love. His audience includes youth as well as beggars. This is how Mikhail gets in contact with the beggars. The author feels peeved for he has been one of the reasons for his wife’s disappearance. With Maria, Mikhail attends an interview on his book A Time to Rend and A Time to Sew. There he narrates the story of his book. It is a letter written to a woman far away. Suddenly he enters into a trance and experiences euphoria through the impact of the voice. There he makes a pact with God that if he manages to succeed, he is sure that whatever he has hoped for, will be achieved. Since to divert himself from the preoccupations of the Zahir, instead of writing an article, he leafs through a magazine
where the captions catch his sight - “accommodator or giving - up point” (238). He is reminded of his marital life and the reason that has caused their separation. He finishes an article on which he could not pay much attention previously. The article sounds more like the author’s own story. Once Esther takes pleasure in describing an interview with a police officer, an expert in interrogation. The author is astonished to know that Mikhail, the beggars, the barbarians and all the others, except him, have a piece of blood stained shirt of a soldier in his deathbed, given by Esther when she has been to meet them to spread the energy of love. He realizes that one must talk quietly, play music quietly, weep in private because everything is over - ruled by the all powerful Zahir, the meaning of success, the best way to love, the importance of rewards. Since their procession has been a disturbance to others, they move on to a sophisticated building where they sit in a circle to pray for the author to find his Zahir. Before they conclude, Mikhail stretches out a piece of blood stained cloth explaining to him how he got it. The cloth is the shirt of a soldier on whose request Esther has distributed it to those who believe in death.

tell those people that I have just seen the face of God; tell them not to be afraid, but to grow complacent either. Seek the one truth, which is love.

Live in accordance with its laws. (274)

Of course the author has known that Esther is in Steppes situated at Central Asia. He calls himself an executor of Esther’s thoughts. He has taken Esther to a nomad - his grandfather who comments about her soul that has greatly transformed. Though she appears to be sad, her soul looks happy and love’s energy has begun flowing again. Further her mission of passing this energy on the whole of people
including her husband will soon have an effect. Sleep looks like “a place of vastness, simplicity and complexity” (313). In the desert, he feels as if in oblivion while riding a horse. He is unable to understand where he is. His doubts are being clarified by Dos. He says that he is in a place where Esther, whom he longed to meet, is somewhere in the infinite space weaving carpets. Though the desert is devoid of people, he senses her presence, hearing her song while weaving. He seems to have understood the reason why Esther has chosen the place. “There was nothing, absolutely nothing to distract her attention; it was the emptiness she had so yearned for the wind would gradually blow her pain away” (313).

He, in addition, wonders if ever Esther would have thought of his arrival. An absolute calmness overcomes him as if he is in paradise. He senses a sort of eternity living neither on the past nor future.

I feel a sense of adoration and ecstasy I am thankful for being alive. I pray quietly listening to the voice of nature and understanding that the invisible world always manifests itself in the visible world. (314)

In a trance, he asks himself certain fundamentally unanswerable questions. Coelho is taken to an area full of vast sand dunes for a naming ceremony. The desert sand produces a kind of resonance - an intense vibration. Paulo Coelho is a prolific writer and he gives a clear cut detail of how the resonance is created. It is a sound produced by the wind which penetrates through the actual grains of sand. They get ready for the ritual at the top of the hill, turning towards the west. Mikhail and Dos dedicate the author with a prayer in a piercing cold. Coelho chooses a name
“nobody” to commemorate Ulysses. Dos instructs him to withstand the cold and not to think about heat. In the concluding part of the ritual, Dos’ voice appears to be from the sky and he welcomes the author to the land of Tengri. After this ceremony, Dos-an akyn” (324) who remembers and passes on the stories or legends about the people who travel far and wide, leaves for Almaty to carry on his mission. Later Mikhail briefs about “Tengri”- that is “sky worship” (323) which is a kind of religion without religion associated with divinity. The author is immensely delighted at his own reformation which would really please Esther. Five minutes later, they enter a small village where Esther is expected to be teaching French in turn for learning to make carpets in a small building. The author becomes over curious to see Esther. He compares his journey towards Esther to that of the warrior Ulysses whose wife Penelope awaited him weaving shroud in Ithaca Island. He owes his gratitude to God who, having granted him many roles, has graced this day as a last chance to meet and understand Esther. He treads towards the 100 meters that has separated him from Esther, his beloved. This journey to Steppes for him appears as a journey to Ithaca. He meets Esther with a hemp in his throat. He is being intensified by the words of Esther “I waited as Penelope waited for Ulysses, as Romeo waited for Juliet, as Beatric for Dante” (336).

She even quotes a phrase on love from the author’s book A Time to Rend and A Time to Sew, “Love is a disease no one wants to get rid of, those who catch it never try to get better; those who suffer do not wish to be cured” (336). Esther is pleased to see her husband turn out to be man she wished for - capable of selfless love. Sensing it as an apt moment, she gives him too a piece of blood stained cloth. At last, the soul of the world has allowed him to find his zahir - Esther.
The mystic experience in *The Zahir* is absolutely from a different perspective. Generally, the main characters of Coelho become mystified during a journey or an adventure. Whereas in *The Zahir* the protagonist witnesses how people enter into a trance-like state and they come out with their personal misfortunes. The very title of the novel *The Zahir* itself mystifies anyone when he searches for its meaning. Zahir means visible, present, incapable of going unnoticed. In Arabic it is something or someone who is known once or has been in contact that gradually occupies our every thought until we can think of nothing else. Paulo Coelho also mentions Jorge Luis Borges - a writer’s interpretation for Zahir, “this can be considered either a state of holiness or of madness” (*The Zahir* Preface).

The feature that adds a feather to the cap of Coelho is his powerful handling of mysticism in all his novels distinctly. He makes the reader think about the way he highlights this aspect. *The Zahir* is an enlightening story of faith and the reclamation of pure love. The story revolves around the narrator, a bestselling novelist’s search for his missing wife, Esther. He enjoys all the privileges that money and celebrity bring. He is suspected of foul play by the authorities and the press of having a role to play in the inexplicable disappearance of his wife from their Paris home. In this novel *The Zahir*, Mikhail’s extraordinary power of having visions during his childhood is an unimaginable one yet acceptable. Mikhail experiences it for the first time in Kazakhsthan when he is returning from school.

A strong wind blows, Mikhail sees lights around him and suddenly he loses his consciousness. He sees a little girl in a white dress with blue belt, flying above him. Suddenly she vanishes. At first her mother refuses to believe dismissing it a hallucination. Again the same thing happens but on an early morning. His mother accompanies him to the place to ensure it. There the little girl appears but remains
invisible to his mother. Mikhail listens to her voice for the first time when he
enquires about his father. It is the first time he hears her voice. The girl suggests
them to tie a scrap of fabric whenever they pray.

Gradually people who have faith in it gather on the hill to enquire about their
loved ones through Mikhail. Sometimes he transcends and sometimes he remains as
he is and executes what the girl says.

Apparently, I sometimes, go into a trance, fall to the
ground, babble incomprehensibly, [...] I only feel a
warm wind blowing and see bubbles of light all around
me. (191)

One day their ritual is obstructed since the policemen fell the tree. Mikhail is
stupified at this. At that moment, the girl appears to pacify him.

She tells me not to worry, that this was all part of the
plan, even the destruction of the tree and that she will
accompany me now for the rest of my days and will
always tell me what I must do. (191)

Ever since then he has been guided only by the voice. During his interaction
with Mikhail, the author learns the meaning of love - not the physical love or logical
love but the reason for his obsession, love for his life, and love for the whole world.
This revelation completely changes his perspective. His journey from Paris to
Kazakhstan makes him a completely changed man. The journey of self - discovery
and forgiveness comes to a halt by an accident in which the narrator finds time to
reflect and reach a point of where his marriage went sour. (Paulo Coelho’s The
Zahir: A Review: A Story of Dark Obsession and Rebirth (<http://latin-american-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/paulo-coelhos-the-zahir-a-review>). Once when he waits to meet actor Roberto’s Pizzeria, unfortunately he falls down from the building and suffers a neck fracture. He becomes conscious at the same time unconscious. He realizes some strange mysterious sounds and visions which he could hardly hear and remember. On coming back to life, he assumes as if he is being in a coffin and only silence accompanies him.

Light, blessed light - which would save me from that worst of all tortures, suffocation- was gradually illuminating my whole body: [...] the light finally reached my eyes: a soft hand touched mine, someone with an angelic face, was wiping the sweat from my brow. (The Zahir 163)

Coelho is introduced to Mikhail who leads him through what his wife was a part of: from dealing with beggars in Paris, young kids dressed in uniforms of piercings and colourful clothes, of his nightly gatherings at an American restaurant where discussions are random and welcomed. (Paulo Coelho’s The Zahir: A Review: A story of Dark obsession and Rebirth (<http://la.tin-american-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/paulo-coelhos-the-zahir-a-review>)). Coelho who is ignorant as well as disinterested in mysterious happenings starts realizing it slowly after his meeting with Mikhail. At a stage, he is being disturbed by his zahir never allowing him to concentrate on any works. So to get rid of the depression caused by his zahir, he goes on leafing through a magazine. A topic catches his attention - acomodador, that is, giving-up point. He is reminded of various acomodador that has happened in
his life learning archery, fighting and beating others when he was young, learning to play guitar which came to an end abruptly, his marital life and the reason that has caused their separation.

The acomodador: there is always an event in our lives that is responsible for us failing to progress. It described exactly what happens in marriages in general and what had happened in my relationship with Esther in particular. (240)

Before he sets off to search for Esther, Mikhail meets the beggars, barbarians and the nomads. They assemble in a room to pray for the author to meet his wife. While praying, the author is confounded to see a piece of blood stained shirt of a soldier, given by Esther, with almost everybody including Mikhail. He has been confused at the thought that he alone has been neglected. He is also able to see the symbol in everyone in some forms either as a brooch or metal badge or as a piece of embroidery or even drawn on the fabric with pen. Touching the relic given by Esther, they pray for him.

[...] he’s a good man, he knows that love transforms and he allows himself to be transformed by love. He still carries much of his personal history in his soul, but he is continually trying to free himself from it, which is why he stayed with us tonight. He is the husband of the woman we all know, the woman who left me a relic as proof of her friendship and as a talisman. (273)
For a question about the setting of *The Zahir* Coelho says, “The Tengri tradition goes beyond all the formal rituals and helps us to connect directly with mother earth without an intermediary” (*Paulo Coelho on The Zahir* 2009 <http://latin-american-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/paulo-coelhos-the-zahir-a-review>). According to the tradition of Steppes, one has to be renamed to attain peace. On stepping on the Steppes, an absolute calmness pervades all over him. He assumes himself to be in a sort of eternity living neither on the past nor the future. His heart is filled with ecstasy. He prays quietly listening to the voice of nature thinking that “the invisible world always manifests itself in the visible world” (314). Coelho is taken to an area full of vast sand dune. He is compelled to bear the cold otherwise it will then feel as if it is not loved or desired. He enters a state of torpor where he hears the voice of Dos as if from a distance.

Welcome, nomad who crosses the steppes welcome to the place where we always say that the sky is blue even when it is grey, because we know that the colour is still there above the clouds, welcome to the land of the Tengri. Welcome to me, for I am here to receive you and to honour you for your search. (322)

After the ceremony is over, he senses as though his self has undergone many changes. He comes to understand what love really is, what passing the energy of love really means. He even remembers a moment when love has conversed with him in a hospital.
Love has spoken to me: I am everything and I am nothing, I am the wind and I cannot enter windows and doors that are shut [...] the wind is made of air there is air inside your house but everything is shut up [...] You will continue to breathe, you will know a small part of me, but I am not a part, I am everything and you will never know that. (333)

His soul is replenished with fresh energy of love which enables him to realize that his wife Esther has skipped around the world distributing patches of blood stained cloth from the uniform of a dead soldier to remind people that love is the last thing a dying person thinks of. At last he meets Esther with full enthusiasm. Love is beautifully interpreted by the author in his book which is pronounced through Esther. She hands over a piece of blood stained cloth to him saying: “Love is a disease no one wants to get rid of. Those who catch it never try to get better, and those who suffer do not wish to be cured” (336).

Actually this is what has been disturbing the author. The love that he has had for Esther has arrested his actions, instigated him to long for Esther, search her and finally he finds his Zahir.

Suffering occurs when we want other people to love us in the way we imagine we want to be loved and not in the way that love should manifest itself - free and untrammelled, guiding us with its force and driving us on. (337)
God graces everyone with happiness though grace cannot be hoarded. It should be made use of at the right moment to attain peace. If one misses it, it will be lost forever is the main stream of the novel. We all have our desires but when the desire becomes our zahir it drives us to reach the unknown heights and conquer the less visited paths.

Reading Paulo Coelho is like travelling with a higher soul on the journey of life. His yet another brilliant offering is *The Witch of Portobello* which takes us to an inner journey almost into the hidden power of our life as he fuses philosophy, religious miracle, love, fear of loss and a kind of moral parable. In the author’s own words, this novel is written in the form of a biographical inquiry written after the death of the protagonist. It has been written as a series of accounts of individuals who directly interact with the protagonist Athena, in *The Witch of Portobello*. This is a unique narrative technique adopted by Coelho. The list of individuals includes her divorced husband, foster parents, biological mother, apartment owner, parish priest, friends especially a newspaper reporter Heron and an actress Andrea Mc Cain etc. From the individual perspectives of Athena’s adoptive parents, her pagan teacher, her student, her journalist friend, her ex-husband and several others, the tale of Sherin Khalil is recounted.

The biography starts with the words of the reporter Heron who considers himself the lover of Athena. She, the ordinary Sherin H.Khalil of Romania with gypsy origin, being deserted by her biological mother, is later fostered by rich Lebanese parents. At the age of nineteen, she starts the quest to fill up the spaces within her. She enters into trance while dancing. Her teacher Deidre o’Neill also known as Edda lends her full support to help her in her inner search. Being a woman
of twenty second century, she has to encounter many hardships created by the twenty first century people. Athena is a blend of four classical archetypes the virgin, the martyr, the saint and the witch. A numerologist named Leila Tainate predicts Athena’s nature as optimistic, sociable and likely to be surrounded by people in search of understanding, compassion, generosity due to which she might be trapped into complications.

Furthermore she would possess an interest in mystical subjects through which she would try to bring harmony to the people who rely on her. Unable to conceal the secret, Samira R.Khalil, Athena’s adopted mother, reveals her gypsy origin disclosing her original name Sherine. Her adopted parents Samira and Gian Carlo shower unbound love and care on her. In her childhood, she used to spend her time in church, later telling her parents about her interactions with angels, saints and visions of the Virgin Mary. This habit of her adopted daughter frightens Samira. As a result, they meet a paediatrician, a specialist in child psychology. They try to change the environment of Athena by replacing her solitary interactions with games. Suddenly one night she feels that hell is at close quarters which frightens her. Her prediction about the procrastination of the war comes true. Lukas lessen, her senior, often compromises her during fights. He develops a soft corner towards Athena. Since Athena’s father often receives death threats, they move on to London. To comfort them, Athena pretends to have entered into trance and predicts many matters. In coincidence the predictions come true which provides ground for confirmation of her power. At a particular stage, dance becomes her passion. She forgets herself when she dances. Lukas presents himself as a person who has followed his parents’ rules and has obeyed their words. But now he is left to take up a wise decision against his parents. He also confesses his transformation due to Athena’s presence. Lukas wavers between rationality and mysticism. At this juncture, the author gives the
positive and negative sides of love referring to “possession by the sacred” (The Witch of Portobello 38). One would attribute this either in his childhood or adolescence. This makes us feel that our whole life is justified, our sins forgiven and that love is still the strongest force that can transform us forever.

But at the same time, we feel afraid. Surrendering completely to love, be it human or divine means giving up everything, including our well being or our ability to make decisions [...] The truth is that we don’t want to be saved in the way God has chosen. We want to keep absolute control over our every step [...] of our decisions. (38)

One of the exclusive narrative techniques of Paulo Coelho is the way he handles the concept of love in all his novels. To him, love is not something that arrives, moves in and starts directing everything. In real, it is a force and only the strongest souls like Athena would allow themselves to be swept along. She spends hours together in deep contemplation. Another thing she contemplates is music. Having a special gift for music, she dances too well that she seems to be blessed by the holy virgin. Lukas is a witness to it. She admits to him that whenever she comes to praise the Virgin, she considers herself a vessel in which the divine energy manifests itself. It is that energy that asks her to have a child so that she can provide protection and security from which she had been forbidden. She remains firm in her wish to give birth to a child which is her mission. When Viorel is born, Lukas is only twenty two. More than a student, he turns into a responsible man to support his family facing hardships. His odd times put an end to his marital life.
Despite all these, Athena’s full concentration falls on her son, music and dance. She moves on to a small attic flat on Basset road with Viorel. Meeting her father on Sunday mass in church to voice her depressions becomes customary. To support her family financially she finds a job in one of the banks. One fateful Sunday brings her great humiliation in the church where she has been forbidden from receiving the sacrament since she has signed her divorce papers. Athena’s father also feels helpless and later consoles himself thinking about one of the verses in the Bible said by Jesus Christ. “My child, I’ve been excluded too. It’s a very long time since they have allowed me in there” (57). From an early age, she takes on the self-imposed name Athena and has an innate spiritual calling. She marries young, has a son and divorces her husband - all because she believes it is her spiritual purpose (Review: The Witch of Portobello-A New Age Novel Full of Enlightenment <http://recommend-Fiction. Suite. 101. com/article, cfm/review-the witch - of - Portobello#>).

Pavel, Athena’s owner of the house, performs a ritual in his house at night. In the ritual, they dance vigorously with their eyes closed for some music in order to be in touch with something stronger and more powerful. She enquires Pavel, the owner, about the ritual that reminds of her own experience similar to this. From then on she also joins them with her soul dancing. Further the apartment owner teaches her to dance according to the music produced by nature. He also teaches her about the vertex - the culminating point which can be reached only if one accepts it and recognizes its light. Through the words of Athena, Coelho highlights the significance of dance which is used as a medium to attain divinity. In this novel The Witch of Portobello, the protagonist is sublimated through dance. It illumines the light present in her. So from the following day onwards, she attends their ritual and she makes it
customary to dance for the music on sundays. Her apartment owner urges her to take part in the group ritual rather than an individual performance because it is only a group that is connected by the same energy that inculcates a kind of aura which helps everyone into a trance. She agrees to do so which turns her into an optimist. On her compulsion, she is given a copy of the tape to perform the ritual in the morning which stimulates her to pay more attention to everything around her.

Copies of the tape have been distributed among her colleagues that induce their curiosity to learn about the vertex. Peter Shemeg, the manager of a bank, has appointed Athena as his clerk with an intention of firing her soon. Being an expert in reading people's mind, he knows well how to provoke his unwanted staff to get rid of him. He tries the same foul play with Athena also. But to his surprise, the whole branch complains about the inconvenience. Only then he realizes that a group of workers is orchestrated; a good manager is a conductor and he knows well who is out of tune, who is in harmonious commitment and who is simply following the crowd. Though at first Athena feels discomfort later she seems to be more relaxed and communicative telling everyone about the secret of rejuvenation. She develops a good rapport with her co-workers. Feeling envious of their unity, the manager sends her to Barcelona for a group meeting to explain their management techniques as they have increased the profit without increasing the expenditure. At her request, in the meeting, he speaks of the new kind of emotion - passion to his superiors, being aroused by Athena which has stimulated high energy among the workers. The high energy as a result has been the source of the increase in productivity. He adds that how the workers use music as a stimulus and a refresher while he is detailing the happenings. Their managing director also joins them sharing the personal esoteric experience that he has gained during one of the holidays. He applauds Athena for her
efforts. In the desert where she goes for supper with her son, she meets Natil Alaihi, an expert in local cooking. There, to while away the time she dances on the dunes to the music of her radio-cassette. He relates her dance to similar ritual performed by a particular sect in his religion in order to get closer to Allah.

However, Athena expresses her dissatisfaction with dancing since the light that is being produced by her dance asks her to go further. So he teaches her the art of calligraphy - practising letters and carving out its meaning through practice through which he finds God. Every Friday she practises the art, leaving her son to engage himself in drawing. Calligraphy teaches her patience. Together they work on an Arab poetry. In this process, her body gets educated to manifest every sensation of her soul. Natil Alaihi does not disclose the mysterious gifts possessed by Athena for her gift not only enables her to have an encounter with God but purifies her. Through calligraphy she learns that serenity and elegance are the supreme factors of learning to write. At a certain level, she masters calligraphy. During one of their strolls in the desert, Natil mentions her attaining perfection. When she moves on from one word to another she loses her focus for a fraction of second. This distraction is due to the nursing of the unwanted things that possess her mind - that is her birth mother - the hand that first rocked her in the cradle. He further suggests that the blank spaces would remain unfulfilled until she finds her birth mother. Then onwards she quests towards her biological mother. Somehow she manages to negotiate her parent. During her search for her biological mother, she meets Heron, a journalist working for the BBC documentary in Romania. She is attracted by Heron’s talks on the myth of the vampire and his decision to visit Dracula’s castle in Transylvania. Transylvania is the place where Athena expects to find her biological mother. She reveals this to Deidre o’ Neill also known as Edda who is referred to as Athena’s teacher in the rest
of the novel. On her way towards the bus station, she meets a little girl with whom she compares herself for a moment. This incident enables her to enter into a trance - a chaotic trance. Edda warns Athena against such trance which is highly dangerous.

Another character introduced by Paulo Coelho is Vosho Bushalo, the owner of a restaurant who belongs to the gypsy race. He is a man who is highly dissatisfied with the treatment towards gypsies. People generally suspect gypsies of kidnapping children and enslaving them. Athena approaches him in order to get help to find her mother but he hesitates to help her because he suspects her to be one of the persons helping the securiate. However, he is the person who knows about Athena’s mother. After questioning her a lot, he agrees to help her in finding her biological mother Liliana soon. Athena is accompanied by Heron and later she starts dancing on seeing which Heron becomes spell bound. She dances ferociously out of consciousness like a priestess invoking angels and demons. Athena, though with uneasiness, clarifies her doubts regarding St. Sarah, the patron saint of gypsies who has a church in France and to which Liliana has been forbidden from visiting. Subsequently, Athena interrogates her mother about her origin. Through Liliana, Coelho makes something obvious. That is, motherliness is the same all over the world irrespective of countries and creeds. Liliana spends time with Athena celebrating nature and the Great Mother. According to nature’s law, the strong survives and the meek learn to hide their strength only to express when necessity arrives. “We don’t believe that God made the universe. We believe that God is the universe and that we are contained in him and He in us” (141). He should, actually be called as Goddess or Mother who, like all mothers, protects us in all our endeavours. Athena introduces Heron to her mother who learns in detail about their worship, their communication with creation and so on. During their conversation, Liliana refers to St. Sarah, a Goddess whom they celebrate rather than praying since everything begins in one vertex. Before leaving, Athena
pays a last visit to her mother who offers an obligation of offering a shawl to the
image of St Sarah in the little French village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. In The
Zahir, the author is obsessed by the absence of his wife Esther. He feels as if his void
has been fulfilled at the discovery of his wife. Whereas in The Witch of Portobello, to
Athena, the absence of her birth mother occupies the blank spaces of calligraphy.
Calligraphy does not only teach her to fill the blank spaces by finding her mother but
also the true motherliness, mother’s love and care. Shorter may be the time she has
spent with her mother but greater has been the fulfilment of her empty spaces.

After her quick return from Dubai, she meets Edda, a lady doctor, mainly to
fill in the blank spaces. Edda teaches her something more abstract beyond human
perception. She gives a worthy lecture on happiness which neither depends on money
nor poverty. Happiness rests on satisfaction or being content. She creates an
optimistic approach in her by uttering that “with each step we take, we arrive” (157).
By restrospecting Athena, Edda finds her to be a discontented person neither a typical
mother nor a typical wife. To ward off her imbalance, Edda teaches her an exercise.
The effect of her exercise makes her regret over the imperfection of the empty spaces
which she has foolishly thought of filling by meeting her mother. As a remedy to this
problem, her teacher advises her to find a student to teach something unknown to her
so that Athena, by teaching others, can learn what she has to learn yet. Athena is
advised to be different in her teachings. In Heron’s research on St. Sarah, he is
assisted by one Antonie Locadour. He explains why people are interested in pagan
traditions. He says, according to pagan tradition the Goddess is in everything and
everything is part of the Goddess. Though signs are not very positive, human beings
have found their path to the spiritual world. One fine day Andrea McCain, an actress
cum girl friend of Heron, meets Athena.
On seeing Andrea, Athena is much pleased for she hopes to learn more through her. Her doubt is regarding the life and customs of the gypsies. She speaks of two things which are unknown to Athena - the reason for learning about Goddess, the mother and about the origin of the theatre. At the theatre, she is bombarded with questions by Andrea’s friend. During their discourse, she speaks about the Great Mother who is called Gaia. According to the Greek myth, she was born out of chaos. With her existed Eros, the God of love and only then the mother gives birth to the sea and the sky. This is called as Immaculate Conception. After this meeting, Athena meets Edda to enquire whether or not to interact with Andrea’s friends. Edda, encourages her to utilise the opportunity, casting away all her negative thoughts. Further more she advises her to surrender herself either to dance or silence or to everyday activities thereby enabling Goddess Mother to take possession of her body and soul. She accounts that the main aim of life is revelation, listening to one’s own self. As for Athena, she reveals herself through dance. Heron assures Athena by praising her dance and even takes a chance to express his love quoting Khalil Gibran’s poetic lines. “It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked” (190).

The following day, Athena starts her first class at the theatre for Andrea and her friends including Heron. Though her effort has been a failure at first, later she commands them according to their temperament to transform into some unknown thing like sacred earth and centre. Since Athena is not duly applauded by Andrea’s friends, in a depression, she reports to Edda about her waning enthusiasm and discontentment. Edda pacifies her, telling her that she possesses the presence of the Great Mother. Yet she is incapable of recognising the presence. When Athena is in trance, Edda instructs her that her only exigency is to justify her life which contains the two extremities of danger and ecstasy. At the theatre Andrea imitates the ritual of
Athena while they practise for a psychodrama. Shortly after the relaxation, Andrea is gradually transformed into Athena. She starts the ritual with the concept of love which her friends are ready to obey. They play their part with great gusto and conviction. Athena teaches them the music ritual through which one can communicate with God. They are meant to dance awkwardly which seems to be difficult to them. She persuades them that changes happen only when people act against what is prevailing. It is then that they witness the transformation of Athena into the soul of Hagia Sofia. In a trance, she cures the diseases of all. She advocates Andrea to liberate her world, that is Heron.

On hearing the news of Hagia Sofia, Edda is astonished terribly because Hagia Sofia is none other than the soul of mother, being filled into the body of Athena - a way of knowing another reality. Throughout she has been guided by the sign of the Great Mother - being a light in her dance, a letter in calligraphy and a fire in the mirror. Hagia Sofia ritual grabs everyone’s attention. After everyone has left the room, Athena proclaims about the Goddess Mother, Hagia Sofia aura and her trance. Now both Athena and Andrea indulge in a performance in which Andrea commands and Athena obeys. In the following days, she demonstrates to Heron about the possibility of seeking God and Goddess even through sex and making love. From then on, their group meeting becomes regular on mondays. Athena goes to meet Edda for more counseling. She remarks about her meeting with his protector in a forest who made her a spiritual teacher. After his acquaintance, Edda begins her treatment by combining technique and inspiration along with the guidance of the Great Mother. Above all, she is so cautious not to be misinterpreted as a witch doctor.
Amidst this, an unforeseen rumour about Athena’s ritual spreads in London. Rev. Ian Buck protests Athena’s Hagia Sofia ritual as satanic cult led by a Lebanese woman Sherine H. Khalil in the Portobello road. This issue, takes a repulsive turn during their next meeting. A formal investigation brings the details of the ritual to light. However, Athena remains impervious to retreat. Hagia Sofia insists on the manifestation of love which is nothing other than the Mother herself. When Edda is consoling Athena regarding the tribulations she has been facing, the latter receives a sign which instigates her to keep going. Then Edda takes her to a forest, where they feel the presence of the mother, a mysterious inner joy or euphoria at a specified place. They perform a fire ritual. Athena receives commands and consequently she obeys. Being blessed by Edda, she marches towards her monday meeting. Heron gives his moral support by preparing an ideal interview. He accompanies her to the following meeting on monday. In a quite unexpected juncture, the throng gets agitated worsening the situation. This time she speaks of diet which is again flayed by Rev. Buck. Victoriously he turns the table against Athena. She is accused by people of indulging an innocent boy in such occults. When everything becomes normal, Athena plans a trick. She records a tape mentioning her death - threats and compels Heron to keep it confidentially for five years. Athena disappears entirely soon after this incident. Suddenly after two months, Heron receives a phone call informing the demise of Sherine H. Khalil in Hampstead. Of course, her mission is carried over by Andrea with extra attractions.

Incantations, rituals, spells and charms were integral to witchcraft in Southeastern Europe. Folk healing was the task of the village witch, who possessed special skills. In Bulgaria, villages typically maintained one white witch - a practitioner of healing magic - and one black witch - a practitioner of harmful magic.
In Slovenia, female witches derived their power from a lunar Goddess; male witches sought to protect the village from evil (South Slavic Witchcraft 2007 <http://www.answers.com/south%20American%20literature>). Amidst these people who possess magical powers, Coelho attempts to present a woman who endeavours to seek God through music and dance. Signs, visitations, witchcraft, the Great Mother, mysticism, meditation and magic are the ingredients of the novel The Witch of Portobello. Among the ingredients, meditation and signs enable Athena to sense the presence of the Goddess Mother which mystifies her. The term mystical theology denotes a direct experience with divine. Typically mystics, theistic or otherwise, see their mystical experiences as part of a larger undertaking aimed at human transformation and not as the terminus of their efforts. Thus, in general, mysticism would best be thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions and experiences aimed at human transformation. The protagonist of The Witch of Portobello - Athena’s life incorporates distinctive practices, discourses, traditions and experiences solely to attain the divine spark. But ill-fated she is to be called as a witch by one Rev. Ian Buck. Her initial experience of trance is discovered by her parents in the church which she most frequently visits. At first her mother ignores her visions of invisible friends - angels and saints as it is quite natural for children to have visions which they forget as they grow. But the following incident agitates her mother when Athena has said that “she had seen a woman dressed in white like the Virgin Mary” (23). Suddenly one night she reports her that hell is closer which scares her a lot. At times she confesses her spiritual energy to Lukas. She also shares experience of getting into trance as soon as the music is played at church; she not only has a special gift for music but also for dance. Many a time, Lukas has seen her playing guitar and singing hymns in praise of the holy Virgin as if the atmosphere has
been touched by the hand of an angel. He realizes a sense of paradise, of possession by the sacred. Talking about the possession by the sacred, Athena quotes.

 [...] The fact is that, to a greater or lesser extent, all creative human beings have such experiences, which are known as “possession by the sacred” [...] for a fraction of a second, we feel that our whole life is justified, our sins forgiven and that love is still the strongest force, one that can transform us forever.

(38)

Whenever there is a pause in the music, she will resume a prayer. Her trance like state mystifies Lukas. In such an occasion, he is only conscious of the present, neither the past nor the future. This is what is referred to as Hunches by Paulo Coelho in The Alchemist. He enters into a state of worship, ecstasy and gratitude for being in the world. He senses the grandeur of God, through which simple things are revealed to him. Besides, Athena remarks

When I come here to praise the Virgin with my music,
I’m not bothered about what other people might think.
I’m simply sharing my feeling with her. And that’s how its always been, ever since I was old enough to think for myself. I’m a vessel in which the divine energy can make itself manifest. And that energy is asking me now to have a child, so that I can give it what my birth mother never gave me: protection and security. (The Witch of Portobello 41)
Her divine quest begins in the second phase of her life - after she divorces her husband Lukas due to marital disharmony. The very incident that has created this sort of impact is when she has been forbidden entry into the church since she is a divorcee. From her initial beginnings as a devout member of the Catholic Church, to her humiliating dismissal, Athena searches for a way to fit into the world on a spiritual level. She finds herself connecting to her spiritual self through music and dance, and like any good prophet she shares her discovery with those around her. Through her newly embraced spirituality, she prospers in her life and is able to travel extensively and learn new ways to channel her mystic side. She rents a house in an apartment where the owner Pavel of that apartment holds a dancing ritual at night. They strongly believe that while doing so, they are in touch with something stronger and more powerful. Seeing her obsession with dance, the owner Pavel teaches her to dance, in accordance with the sound made by natural things that move to unearthly rhythms while dancing. Athena perceives herself to be a free spirit that takes her to sublime heights, contemplates the present, divines the future which is finally transformed into pure energy “and that gives me enormous pleasure, a joy that always goes far beyond everything I’ve experienced or will experience in my life time” (61). In a way of elevating her mind, the owner talks about the vertex in dance - the culminating point. Coelho pays a verbal tribute to dance highlighting its nobility. In this novel, he glorifies dance that bridges the human soul and the divine spark.

Dance only to the sound of percussion; repeat the process every day; know that, at a certain moment your eyes will, quite naturally, close and you will begin to see a light that comes from within, a light that
answers your questions and develops your hidden powers. (64)

The Director General calls the primary emotions, channelled by Athena, esoteric which he has personally experienced during one of the holidays. Though he has attempted to do many things to challenge the void, he could not give full concentration.

I had a long, hard struggle with myself not to get up from my chair. Gradually through, the anxiety gave way to contemplation and I started listening to my soul - or intuition or primary emotions whatever you choose to believe in. Whatever you call it, that part of me had been longing to speak to me but I had been too busy [...] it wasn’t a dance but the complete absence of noise and movement, the silence, that brought me into contact with myself. And believe it or not, I learned a great deal about the problems bothering me.

(86)

At a highly incommode position, he tries to introspect. This has enabled him to analyse his problems on his own accord and to take better decisions with clearer understanding. Athena is a restless and exuberant woman by nature yet calligraphy teaches her patience. It enables her to sit quietly for hours together focusing on Arab poetry. Natil, the calligrapher has processed her and has prepared her spirit every minute. She becomes hypnotized when Natil says that everything on earth, smaller or bigger, makes sense. As far as calligraphy is concerned, he says, fingers take
prominent role. He examines the mysterious gifts that Athena possesses but never wishes to disclose, as her gift not only enriches her to have an encounter with God but also purifies her.

Edda - her teacher, actually a doctor, has a vital role in processing Athena towards the divine energy. She pinpoints her set backs and educates her to ward off her fears and pessimistic thoughts. By doing so, Edda smoothens her path towards divine spark. During their first meeting, Athena runs into a little girl. On seeing her, she forgets everything around for a while except the little girl. Later Edda expresses that her unconscious mind is pleased by nostalgia.

Something touched your unconscious mind. Perhaps you saw yourself as you would have been if you hadn’t been adopted - begging in the street. At that moment, your brain stopped reacting. Your spirit left you and travelled down to hell to meet the demons from your past. Because of that, you did not notice the woman across the street - you were in a trance, a disorganized chaotic trance that was driving you to do something which was good in theory but in practices, pointless!

(119)

Athena eventually takes on a student Andrea, on the advice of her own spiritual teacher Edda to whom she teaches her secrets. By forming a connection with her student, she is able to pass down her learnings and ensure that they continue to be spread the world over. Athena voluntarily visits the theatre of Andrea where she is impressed by Andrea’s friends with more questions about the game of seduction, fertility rites etc. Athena asks them to transform into something unknown to them.
She directs them to associate certain images with what they have transformed themselves into. The moment she utters the word sacred, everyone makes some gestures to imitate it. Entirely different it has been as everyone has had their own individuality. But their signs for earth and centre has been identical.

“But I felt something strange” said one of the oldest actors. “When she said ‘centre’ it was as if all my vital energy were suddenly focused in my navel. I’ve never experienced that before” (198). This navel episode reaches Antoine through Heron. Though a foreigner, Coelho gives a clear perception of Hindu myth in relation with the navel. It is a belief that in the navel of Vishnu, the God of creation and destruction, resides the God who rules each cycle. As for yogis, it is one of the chakras or sacred points of the human body. On the whole, Coelho presents a strong and enormous illustration to emphasise the navel as the centre of all.

Primitive tribes often used to build monuments in the place they believed to be the navel of the world. In South America, people who go into trances say that the true form of the human being is a luminous egg, which connects with other people through filaments that emerge from the navel. The mandala, a design said to stimulate meditation, is a symbolic representation of this. (208)

The Hagia Sofia ritual has had a far reaching effect that flabbergasted not only Andrea’s theatre throng but also others who have come to know about it. Once the throng of Andrea is taken to participate in Athena’s music and dance ritual by Heron. Of course they are hesitant in the beginning but later as they start obeying her words,
something miraculous takes place. They witness Athena entering into a trance and embracing the soul of Hagia Sofia at the peak of their dance. She begins predicting people’s problems both physical and mental. On seeing Viorel who stands frightened at the transformation of her mother, Hagia Sofia says

You stopped laughing and dancing when you saw me embracing your mother and asking to speak through her mouth. But you know I wouldn’t be doing this if she hadn’t given me her permission. I’ve always appeared before in the form of light and I still am that light but today I decided to speak. (230)

The news reaches Edda who is delighted for she knows that it is actually the soul of Mother that filled the body of Athena - “by touching the deepest part of the river that flows through her soul she had come into contact with the Mother” (232). Without being taught by anyone, she has let the spark of the Great Mother enter into her since she has been guided by her signs - a light in her dance, a letter in calligraphy, a fire in the mirror. Even Hagia Sofia might have been one of the instructions given by the Mother herself. Edda recalls a similar experience that she has realized in her life.

Everything around me was different and I felt like saying things that I would never normally dare to say. I didn’t lose consciousness, I knew I was stilled but paradoxically I wasn’t the person I was used to being with. (234)
As for Athena is concerned, the contradictory movement of her body and soul enable her to get disconnected from her body thus paving way for the Mother to enter into her soul. That spark from the Mother enables Athena to perceive things from a different angle. This enables her to see people’s emotions too.

A kind of blanket lies between the physical and the spiritual world, a blanket that changes in colour, intensity and light; this is what mystics call aura (235). This aura monitors the happenings. These are also transparent forms mixed up with human auras called ‘ghosts’. The unrhythmic dance had made everyone intimidated because they have to do things as they had been done than doing it in the another way. To tackle the problem caused by Rev. Ian Buck who accuses her of arousing the evil spirits using some magical spell and exploiting her son for the ritual, Edda takes her to the forest. At a chosen place, she feels the presence of the Mother - a mysterious inner joy or euphoria. There they perform a ritual by setting fire to the logs collected by Athena. She compares the burning logs to life. In order to liberate the energy of our strength, our weakness must be let to reveal itself. They contemplate on the fire amidst the external noises, thus fulfilling the cycle of birth and death of the Mother. They concentrate on the dance of the fire - a symbol in front of them. As Edda throws some specially chosen herbs Athena’s orientation with the fire becomes explicit. She is able to hear a song from the fire which astonishes her. She has been commanded to stay inside a circle drawn by Edda. She dances vigorously so as to invoke the male fire, the fire that purifies everything transforming them into energy.

Relaxing from trance, Edda advises Athena to remember those feelings as a vicious circle since she has a mission to fulfil. This experience emboldens her to face the rebels. Word of Athena’s weekly meetings, in which she channels her inner goddess, Hagia Sophia, spreads and she becomes both something to be seen and
something to be feared. She is faced with ultimatum of losing her son or continuing her spiritual sessions. When everyone is afraid of the commotion, during their regular ritual, Athena remains unshaken. Amidst the curses of the crowd instigated by Ian Buck, she steadily performs the rituals, enters into trance and calls herself the combination of two souls - Philemon - a spirit guide and Hagia Sofia. In that state, she declares her love to Heron calling it a divine spark. She further remarks that love is the soul, blood and body of the Great Mother. It is she who has kindled the passion in both the hearts “the energy of love can never be lost - it is more powerful than anything and shows itself in many ways” (310). Thus in her quest, Athena opens her heart to intoxicating powers and becomes a controversial spiritual leader. Coelho also deals with the theme of returning to the goddess, religion, the interpretation of love, and the feminine part of the divine within the theme of searching for one’s true self and opening to the energies of the world.

The works of Paulo Coelho are abundant with spiritual quest which dates back to his days of extensive travel to learn about the secret societies and oriental religion. Ultimately he acquainted himself with the distinctive traditions and cultures which are still unknown to the world. For instance in this novel Brida, he paints a vivid picture of different customs and rituals of the Wicca’s tradition that were practised in many Asian and European countries especially in Ireland during the early 80’s of the present century. Through Brida, Paulo Coelho teaches us the quest for knowledge with full involvement, how to find one’s soulmate and love as a path finder for the intricacies of life. This novel Brida is an alluring story of a beautiful young Irish girl and her quest for knowledge. In her quest, she seeks help from two teachers. One is a wise man who teaches her about overcoming her fears, that is, the Tradition of the Sun; the other is a woman who teaches her how to dance to the hidden music of the
world and initiates her into the Tradition of the Moon. These teachers see a gift in her but they intend to let her discover it on her own.

The protagonist is Brida O’ Fern who desires to learn magic and subsequently seeks her purpose of life. Lorens is her beloved working as a research assistant to a physics professor at the university. She earns her livelihood as a secretary. Lorens is good at studying stars and Brida too loves to listen to his musings for she thinks it as one of the ways for Lorens to understand the mysteries of the universe. She approaches a wise man called Magus to learn magic. All the time, she has been interested in magic but her search was something beyond that. The Magus lives in solitude in the forest for the sin of using black magic to drive away his rival. When Brida approaches him, he tests her longing to acquire occult powers. She answers his questions frankly and so he consents to teach her the initiation that is dark night. This initiation is to defend herself against the horrible night, in order to make her suitable to learn the Tradition of the Sun. About magic, the Magus says, it speaks all the languages of the human heart; “it is a bridge that allows one to walk from the visible world into the invisible world and to learn the lessons of both those worlds” (16).

That magic is of two forms: the Tradition of the Sun and the Tradition of the Moon. The former teaches the secrets through space and the world that surrounds us and the latter teaches through time and the things that are imprisoned in time’s memory.

Also Magus warns her against disappointment, defeat and despair which she has to encounter with courage for only through “these strange tools God uses to show us the way” (17). At the very first sight itself, Magus recognises her as his soulmate. He teaches her a channelling exercise which is the initial step towards achieving her dream of transformation. She is learning her lessons by herself and she is aware that she is able to do it all by herself. Since her first task has brought considerable change
in her, she wishes to move forward but never knows how as she does not meet the Magus after that, A shop owner who could feed Brida’s appetite for magic, selling occult literature, directs her to Wicca. Wicca is a witch and the teacher of the Tradition of the Moon who makes Brida realize her gift of “discerning the spirits” (124) by taking her back in time and showing what the Tradition has in store for her about her past incarnation, thus realizing her duty as a witch. Through a variety of mystic gizmos and hallucinations, she informs Brida that she is a witch. Brida has been a witch in her previous lives, will be a witch again in future lives. Being a witch is her gift. On one of her visits to Wicca’s apartment she tells Brida about “soulmates”. Brida tries finding it in her boy friend Lorens and as she fails to see it, she is confused whether she has chosen the wrong man. But Wicca clarifies to her that it is possible to fall in love with someone who is not her soulmate. Confusion arises again when she witnesses this light in the Magus when she meets him after a long time.

Meanwhile Wicca plans to get Brida initiated into the Tradition of the Moon on the Equinox as was the custom. Wicca says that to complete the process of initiation, Brida should experience the piety of physical relationship. She is confused with the words uttered by Wicca. She wonders how the concepts piety and physical relationship can go together. She finally asks the Magus who teaches her the holiness of such a relationship. After the strange experience everything around her gains a new colour. This is Brida’s next step towards enlightenment. With the precious gift that she is blessed with, Brida dares to undergo the transformation of enlightenment by the Sabbath arranged by Wicca in the woods. The Sabbath takes place in the woods where Wicca invites all her initiates and friends. Brida invites two special guests for the occasion. Her boyfriend Lorens and her teacher the Magus. The
ceremony begins like an ordinary party and later on it takes a serious phase which enables her to enter into a state of trance. Wicca teaches her how to dance unrhythmically to the music of the world and pray to the moon. While dancing around the fire, she is transported to strange lands where she encounters Wicca’s teacher who has initiated her into being a witch. He further tells her that she has chosen and pursued her path without fear which has earned her the fruit. These words remind Brida of the Magus. For, formerly he has advised her that life is full of fears and risks and one has to be vulnerable to make mistakes in order to reach the goal. For a moment, there is a slight oscillation in Brida whether to clasp hands with Lorens or to follow the Magus who is her soulmate. As she seeks her destiny, she struggles to find a balance between her relationship and her desire to transform herself.

Thus *Brida* ends with a note of contentment as Brida correctly chooses her destiny and leaves Wicca with contemplation about the challenges that she will have to experience as she herself has become a teacher of the Tradition of the Moon. Apart from the vivid portrayal of the transcendental journey that Brida embarks on in the novel, it also deals with themes like passion, love and mystery.

*Brida* is the unrivalled work of Paulo Coelho in which he plunges into the life of a woman who dives into sorcery and experiments with different magical traditions. This novel provides spiritual wisdom. Different themes such as the Great Mother, pagan religions and love are explored from different perceptions. Instances like the “Dark Night” (25) experiences, studying the tarot cards, transcendentalism, learning the Tradition of the Moon, identifying one’s soulmate and the unrhythmic dance bring the mysteries to light. *Brida* captivates the story of a young Irish girl, Brida, who sets out to discover her purpose. Finding herself leaning towards magic and mysticism,
she hopes to have the secrets of life and existence taught to her by a willing and knowledge teacher, while searching for her planetary soulmate (*A Review: Paulo Coelho’s Brida: A Story of Love and Purpose* [http://latin-america-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/a-review-paulo-coelhos-bridas](http://latin-america-literature.suite101.com/article.cfm/a-review-paulo-coelhos-bridas)). Her eagerness towards magic takes her to a forest dwelling wizard Magus. He immediately recognizes Brida as his soulmate but since she is unschooled in the Tradition of the Moon, the feeling is not mutual. After learning about her curiosity, he consents to teach her. Explaining about magic, he says that magic speaks all the languages of the human heart. “Magic is a bridge that allows you walk from the visible world over into the invisible world and to learn the lessons of both those worlds” (01).

The Magus prefers to teach her the Tradition of the Sun. Primarily he warns her to ward off her fear of making mistakes. For, only through tools like disappointment, defeat and despair, God guides human beings. She is immediately subjected to a rather punishing test in the frightening darkness of a forest where she is left all alone to discard her fears and conquer her doubts. He asks her to sit down near a rock and meditate. When she opens her eyes after dusk she is disappointed and frightened as the Magus has left her alone on a rock in the middle of the forest. She loses all her hope that she has maintained when she meets him. Though she feels composed in the beginning, the images of horrible creatures tilt her courage. She envisages the hidden scorpion and snakes that haunt the forest and her mind. Fear of darkness encircles her every thought. Then she reassures herself that those are just fragments of her imagination, feeling that she has been deserted by the Magus, she decides to calm herself by chanting the psalm at which she feels comfortable. She diverts her mind towards certain things that would create a friendly environment
around her, she feels safe at the thought that “the night is just a part of the day” (23). This provides her a protective presence filling her heart with faith and trust.

No one could ever understand faith but faith was what she was experiencing now, an inexplicable immersion in blackest night [...] Miracles couldn’t be explained either but they existed for those who believed in. (23)

This transforms her spirit thereby enabling her to realize that she is acquiring incomprehensible wisdom. After the initial trial that proves worthy of her search, Brida’s path towards witchy enlightenment leads her to another teacher, Wicca, who takes Brida as her pupil and manages to see that with careful instruction, she too can be a witch thereby immersing her in spirituality. From the first time experimenting with the tarot cards, to the complex and important act of visualization, she begins to unravel the mystery of the nature based religion. In between her ritualistic teachings and trying to keep her relationship secure, she finds herself asking the ultimate question. Is there such a thing as a soulmate? From Wicca, Brida learns an entirely unknown phenomenon known as soulmate. This is an astonishing information not only to Brida but also to the readers. For it describes the detailed picture of the increasing progeny. Like crystals, stars, cells and plants, our souls get divided into two during certain reincarnations which form new souls in turn. “Our soul divides into two, and those new souls are in turn transformed into two and so, within a few Generations, we are scattered over a larger part of earth” (37).

The soul of the world which is otherwise known as Anima Mundi by the Alchemists, does not merely keep dividing thereby simply promoting the growth. It also does become weaker gradually. Because of this one is capable of finding his own
soul during his/her journey on the earth. The process of finding ourselves is called love for when the soul is divided, it forms its counterpart as propagated in the Book of Genesis “the soul of Adam was split in two and Eve was born out of him” (38). The fact that a soul could be split in parts is not an occult subject at all. There is just another interpretation of the Bible. It is written that the man should not be left alone and so Eve was created from Adam. Even though Eve was created from the body of Adam, it refers to the soul itself. The only thing that remains immortal in this world is the soul itself (Brida by Paulo Coelho <http://www.flipkart.com/brida-paulo-coelho-book-0007278594=>). Further Wicca says that the soulmate can be identified by a point of light above the left shoulder of one’s soulmate. But in the process of searching for the love, one may have to face failure, disappointment, disillusion yet one should not cease the search in order to be triumphant. The soulmate can be more than one. The pain and pleasure of the soulmates will be felt by us. “If they are well, then we, too happy If they are not well, we will suffer, however unconsciously, a portion of their pain” (Brida 40).

Brida, speculating over the cards, hears a voice as if in a dream. Followed by the mysterious voice, the cards begin to show fantastic scenes of men with oiled bodies, sporting masks like the giant heads of fish and the clouds racing across the sky. The scene then changes to a square surrounded by grand buildings with few old men revealing secrets to a group of young boys. Then a boy in medieval clothes says, “Add seven and eight and you’ll have my number. I’m the devil and I signed the book” (53). Time has taken control over Brida that she is entirely “lost in thoughts” (53). When she is about to open the heavy door that has appeared close to her, the voice of Wicca interrupts her.
‘A door appeared. It was a heavy door, like the door of an old castle. The door came closer to Brida and she had a sense that soon she would be able to open it’ […]

‘Come back’ said the voice. (54)

Wicca teaches her how it is inevitable for one to find his/her soulmate. Finding one’s soulmate is a divine mission in everyone’s life. All human beings have their own counterpart. Man has his feminine part, similarly woman has her male counterpart. The male counterpart present in woman charges with nurturing and maintaining knowledge: Man in “The Night of Time” (63). This male part learns about agriculture, nature and the movements of the stars in the sky. This knowledge is the power that always keeps the universe in its place and the stars to turn in their orbits which is known as the glory of man - to nurture and maintain knowledge. The knowledge that enables the whole human race to survive. On the other hand, the female part is something far more subtle and fragile. Though fragile, it is required for transformation and without this the male knowledge becomes senseless.

The men left the soil fertile, we sowed seeds and the soil was transformed into trees and plants. The soil needs the seed and the seed needs the soil. The one only has meaning with the other. It is same thing with human beings. When male knowledge joins with female transformation, and then the great magical union is created and its name is Wisdom. Wisdom means both to know and to transform. (63)
The concept of soulmate creates a great confusion in Brida for she is incapable of finding the light above the left shoulder of her beloved Lorens. On the contrary, she witnesses this light in the Magus when she meets him for the second time to learn the Tradition of the Sun. With him, she learns many new things like how to speak, how to pray through the soul etc.

In the Tradition of the Sun, it is through prayers that we commune with God. A prayer, when couched in the words of the soul, is far more powerful than ritual.

(102)

Of course the Magus feels comfortable with Brida by his side. From their initial first meeting, Magus is fully aware that Brida is his soulmate. As he begins to spend more and more time with her, he slowly loses his self control and enables her to know that he had been waiting for her. Their relationship blossoms into a tale of reincarnation, love and the quest of life finding answers to humankind’s most relevant questions. Can you have two soulmates at the same time? The soul of the world is an absolutely significant fact that Coelho deals. He has portrayed a clear description of the soul of the world in *The Alchemist* through the shepherd boy Santiago. In *Brida*, Wicca gives a brief account of the same to Brida so as to channel her soul. She brings Brida’s concentration to the external noise which she calls Vibration - the soul of the world, the unceasing sound present everywhere in nature that is capable of transforming itself and travelling towards the light. In *The Witch of Portobello*, Athena dances to the unrhythmic vibrations before entering into a trance. Similarly Wicca tries to enable Brida dance to the naturally ever present vibration - an unrhythmic dance in an illogical way in order to encounter the mysteries of nature. Wicca stimulates her saying that though the journey might appear like a Dark Night,
when it is accompanied by an act of faith, God stretches his arm towards us to succeed. “But God, who is far harder to understand than a Dark Night, appreciates our act of faith, and takes our hand and guides us through the mystery” (Brida 124).

This novel can be aptly compared to The Witch of Portobello for its unrhythmic dance, dancing to the natural vibrations, having visions and so on. It can also be contrasted for one reason, that is, in the latter novel, the protagonist Athena helps the people to unleash the energy within them. Her dance to unrhythmic music acts as a gateway for her to enter into a trance through which she predicts and recuperates the diseases of all. In the process of doing so, she is cautious enough not to be misinterpreted as a witch. Whereas Brida intentionally learns magic and the Tradition of Moon to become a witch. The peculiar feature of Brida is that the witches, characterized here, are devout God-loving Christians. They perform typical pagan rituals, they bemoan the fate of their ancestors who were burned as witches at stakes and they dance naked around bonfires in the forest etc., but they also talk incessantly about God and His plan for witches who are His Gardeners of the universe.

May the Virgin Mary remind us always that it was the women who stayed with Jesus when all the men fled and denied their faith, that it was the women who wept while he carried the cross and who waited at his feet at the hour of his death [...] May the Virgin Mary remind us always that we were burned and persecuted because we preached the religion of Love. (129)
To Wicca, not only the external forces and internal attitudes help one to enter into trance but the clothes that are part of oneself. Sometimes in life they do mark special occasions signified by wearing which one would feel typical emotions. For some, clothes might prove to contain bad vibrations rather than others.

Clothes always transform emotion into matter. It’s one of the bridges between the visible and the invisible.

Some clothes can even be harmful because they were made for someone else, but have ended up in your hands. (133)

For the first time, Brida hears the voice only once saying “What is outside is harder to change than what is inside” (135). She is immensely delighted and her joy finds no bounds. The voice reveals to her how far the external changes have changed her internally. Wicca calls this experience a preparation for initiation which always takes place at the time of the Equinox - “on the days of the year when the days and the night are equal in length” (138). This initiation represents that she is ready for the next step. The next step of Brida is to experience the feminine force - One of the greatest transformational powers that is present everywhere. “It is in the visible world of ordinary people and in the invisible world of mystics” (139) - sex - it can be treated in whatever way one likes. When man gets closer to God, sex is the symbolic means to communicate with the divine. This subject has been elaborately discussed by Coelho through Maria in Eleven Minutes. He utters that sex can also be treated as a sacred subject when a woman’s friendly pain reaches its limit that leads to salvation. “Sex is a mixed force of pleasure and fear in equal measure” (Brida 141). It is obvious that the sexual act is not only a physical communication but the pure forces
of life are in communication with each other. So, to awaken the force of sex, Brida seeks the support of the Magus. He teaches her how all the five senses lose contact at the moment of orgasm.

“During those long seconds everything disappears, to be replaced by ecstasy” (152). This ecstasy is compared to the ecstasy attained by mystics after years of renunciation and discipline. Brida has to elevate all her five senses to experience that ecstasy. She goes out with Lorens in order to execute the ritual taught by Wicca as per the instruction of the Magus. She feels as if all her five senses are transformed into an overwhelming energy; everything is filled by a sense of profound peace “because she was in communication with the world” (164). Being ready for the Equinox, Wicca takes her to a mechanic shop to refine Brida’s soul further. Before repairing the car, the mechanic observes the problem without touching it. Since he has been in contact with the cars, they speak to him in a special language that he alone can understand. Similarly when one tries to understand the Universe, all the queries would be answered automatically. Yet there are certain questions to which only the Almighty knows the answer.

I also know that we will never ever know the Ultimate reason for our existence. We might know the how, where and when of being here, but the why will always be a question that remains unanswered. The main objective of the great Architect of the Universe is known to him alone and to no one else. (171)
Brida wonders at the creation of nature - “God’s Signature” (161). Every creature in nature has some questions about its existence which are answerable yet remain unanswered. She is elated at having been led to perceive such mysterious things. She extends her gratitude to the Magus.

I came to say thank you for teaching me that life is an act of faith and that I am worthy of the search. That has helped me enormously on the path I’ve chosen. (178)

There she finds the light, a completely different light in Magus’ eyes that she could not reject. The light attracts her. Unable to stay away from him, she performs a ritual with him in a circle. The Magus with his powers takes her to one of the eleven secret temples of the Tradition of the Moon where the wheat field becomes a grey desert. They travel through time and space, through the two Traditions. She is exhilarated on seeing the Wisdom of Earth.

She had only read about it in books, mysterious castles and cities that seemed to float on clouds of light. The sky lit up as the Magus drew for her, above the wheat field, the sacred symbols of the Tradition. At one point, they appeared to be in the icy landscape of one of the earth’s two poles but it was not our planet. (196)

Then she invites him for the Equinox Witches’ Sabbath. She also invites Lorens for the party. The next morning Brida reaches the clearing in the wood where many have gathered for the ritual a few as initiates and a few as spectators. Not only witches are part of the celebration but also wizards. The celebration starts with a
glass of wine and dance around with fire. This is a party to cross the bridge between
the visible and the invisible. As the night falls, Wicca intensifies the celebration with
vibrant music. Everyone is on the same wavelength. According to Wicca, “a good
party cleanses the minds of all those taking part” (228). Prayer is the first road to God
and the second is joy. The Magus appreciates the growing level of the collective
energy all the time. He applauds Wicca for having kept everyone’s auras alive in the
shortest time. As soon as the energy vibrations that surround each physical body
become unique, the second part of the ritual starts. The ritual is intensified by wine,
claps and an insistent regular rhythm set by Wicca. Everyone’s eyes are fixed on the
fire, singing the witches’ mantra - the sound of union with the Gifts. This energy is
what Wicca calls female energy, the energy of transformation. Their claps and music
grow fiercer as the energy level increases. They become more free in the astral plane.
“I’m free. I’m proud of my body because it’s the manifestation of God in the visible
world” (237). They pay tribute to their beautiful body because it is through the body
the souls do their work. At the extreme extent, following their teacher, they remove
their dresses to feel free. “Every atom of her body was touching the air and the air
was Generous, it brought with it from afar, secrets and perfumes to clothe her from
head to toe” (238).

Brida, in trance, witnesses Wicca’s teacher who advises her to accept her Gift
because “your encounter with your gift is your encounter with the world” (252).
Throughout her magical learning, Brida realizes that it is only through love one can
bridge the visible and the invisible known to everyone. The only feeling that liberates
is love. The passion that Brida has in discovering herself and her destiny involves
pain, betrayal, disappointment and mysteries. But the Magus is the source of
inspiration who gives her the hope that “The path to wisdom is not being afraid to
make mistakes” (252). Thus Brida finds her traeself by making a lot of mistakes but never ceasing in her efforts to find her dream. She is a modem young woman whose feet are not always on the ground. This mix of clarity and evanescence leaves us with the feeling of having read a journal of myth, a record of restlessness, and reverie. The protagonist’s mystical journey allows us towards our own inner journey.

This chapter lays its focus on sublime encounter which means spiritual learning. This learning is accomplished by quest in two ways: physiological and psychological quests. The selected novels of Paulo Coelho start the quest physically that encourages psychological communication with the external world. The similarities between these novels are, in *The Pilgrimage, The Alchemist, The Valkyries* and *The Witch of Portobello* - physical journey leads to spiritual realization whereas in novels like *Eleven Minutes, The Zahir* and *Brida* - physical relationship transcends to noble learning. The former concept is quite common among other novels but the latter that aflames spirituality through physical relationship is flabbergasting. Among *The Pilgrimage, The Alchemist, The Valkyries* and *The Witch of Portobello, The Alchemist* stands unique. For, except *The Alchemist*, all the other protagonists of the novels are elders and might have had better and bitter experiences of life. So they are partially accustomed to the sufferings that they encounter during their journey towards spiritual path. The only protagonist who is fresh and too young to bitterness is Santiago in *The Alchemist*. An Andalusian shepherd boy-Santiago dreams of a distant treasure in the Egyptian Pyramids one night. And so he is off, leaving Spain to literally follow his dream. None thinks it a fair task to follow one’s dream assuming that dreams are deceptive. Many crucial occasions force him to distrust his dream. He learns many lessons particularly from a wise old Alchemist. The real alchemy here, however, is the transmuting of youthful idealism into mature
wisdom. This Shepherd boy takes the advice of the Alchemist, learning to trust his heart and communes with it as a treasured friend. He emboldens the shepherd boy with his words that “no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams because every second of the search is a second’s encounter with God and with eternity” *(The Alchemist)* 137. These inspiring words of the Alchemist strengthen the boy to reach his treasure. Everyone has dreams. We sometimes dream with our eyes open and sometimes with our eyes closed. Ultimately dreams represent our innermost desires. How many of us would dare to take up a journey like the shepherd boy? is a million dollar question. How many of us would go through all those adventures? Through Santiago, Paulo Coelho teaches us that the path to our goal may not be easy; it may be filled with losses and disappointments but tenacity will lead us to our goal. Yet another nice thing the book teaches is the treasure that we seek may be right next to us. This is the highlighting aspect of the novel which makes it unique among other novels.

Similarly in the second set of novels, sexuality plays a vital role in the protagonists’ divine exploration. *Eleven Minutes, The Zahir* and *Brida*, in these novels, one can perceive the holiness of physical relationship. Perhaps the concepts divine and sexuality are contrary to each other. Yet Paulo Coelho strives to bring the piety present in sexuality to limelight. *The Zahir* is the philosophical and spiritual chronicle of a man’s quest for self-discovery which takes place due to his wife’s inexplicable disappearance from home. The protagonist is forced to re-examine both his marital relationship and his own life. Although his wife’s (Esther) disappearance is a physical and an emotional loss to him, he rediscovers her as he retraces both her footsteps and the disintegration of their visceral connection. In our day to-day life, we are all looking for something, someone to love, someone to love us, something that
adds meaning to our life, our existence, some sign to know we are not alone, some indication to know that our thoughts, feelings, memories will not die with us when our physical body perishes. The novel Brida addresses all these. Brida, the protagonist, quests to find answers to questions that mean the world to her. It does have a love story, even a love triangle (Brida, Lorens and the Magus). One of the occult rituals is to have an intense orgasm in order to connect truly with God. Brida accomplishes this with two different soulmates. So in order to fulfil her rituals, she undergoes such a physical relationship through which she can attain sublimity. In the above mentioned novels (The Zahir and Brida), sexual relationship is a fragment of the novels. Unlike these, the sacred nature of sex within the context of love is the hub of Eleven Minutes. Here sexuality attains an elevated state rather than a mere lustful one. The exclusiveness of this novel is its title Eleven Minutes that implies the time taken to have sex and is discovered by the protagonist Maria-a teenage sex worker. Like other workers, she too wishes to be loyal to her clients for the money she is paid. She finds satisfaction by healing their mental agony. She finds holiness in their happiness. Coelho tells us “sex is civilization’s core problem and that it is far more serious and worrisome than waning rain forests or the hole in the ozone layer” (Amazon.com: Magical Realism <http://www.amazon.com/Magical-Realism/IM/RPAK39J58WBA3>). In short, this novel embarks on a philosophical exploration of sexual love, not filled only with predictable romances.

Though quest is prominent in all the seven novels, the way it has taken dimension in each novel varies in its own prospect. Especially the utilization of mystical exploration is more appealing in The Alchemist and Eleven Minutes that make the novels interesting to read. All information shared by the author throughout his works cannot be viewed as fantasy, for they are the original narration of what has
happened to the author himself or someone close to him. Only if one undergoes such experiences, he can best narrate it to his readers in the same way he has experienced it. In this sense, none can doubt Coelho’s veracity.