Chapter VI

Conclusion

Through their endeavours, the characters of Coelho attain the realization of what their essence is, or in other words it is the process of revealing the real “I” rather than what the others think of a person. Their endeavours are various forms of journeys. It is an exalted process – the strenuous physical journey and the tumultuous spiritual journey seeking the real meaning of the inner Self. It is an achievement that undergoes the classical procedure of incomparable dimensions. It is an inward growth revealing the real “I.” Through this inward movement the individual attains self respect, learns to diminish the profound ego, and voluntarily trains to break free from the fetters of already set, preconceived notions. The individuals achieve courage to make themselves free from the conventional and stubborn ideas imposed on them by the society. In this state of self-actualization, the individuals attain their true potentials realizing what Maslow means by self-actualization. Maslow defines self-actualizations as:

An episode or a spurt in which the powers of the persons come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more integrated and less split, more open or experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego transcending, more independent of his lower needs etc. He becomes in these episodes more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being, more fully human. (“A Theory” 371)
Thus, attaining self-actualization, the characters of Coelho reach the highest pinnacle of their being, a state of enlightenment and eternal ecstasy. After realizing the true essence of their being, the characters of Coelho enjoy their life and live it eternally.

Coelho's characters are enriched with love that enchants their hearts, power that emboldens their spirits and illuminates their minds through enlightenment which make them thoroughly spiritual. “Coelho's characters have a world of their own where they go myriads of developmental phases in order to reach their goal of finding who they truly are” (Mishra 184).

Coelho's characters are more or less a replica of his own self. Coelho remarks “in reality I am all the characters in my book” (Arias 172). He regards that his characters are his snapshots of a given moment of his life. They are like mirrors of his soul and they go into making his novels characteristically autobiographical. Coelho here makes a pertinent observation, “The fact is, the majority of my books, although they are literary narratives, are not fiction. They are actual things I’ve experienced” (Arias 175).

Coelho's characters are the extensions of his own Self. They are amazingly endowed with the craft of alchemy. This lends them a power to penetrate the “Soul of the World” and discover the treasure that has been reserved for them. It is this “inspiration of the universe,” “the love of life” and of things that Coelho lives through, that he believes his characters come from. Like him, he makes them a magus, a warrior of light who appreciate the miracle of being alive, accept failures and whose quest lead them into becoming the persons they want to be. So following their personal legend, making self-
discovery and attaining self-actualization, the characters of Coelho's world give meaning, purpose, and direction to their otherwise jaded, mundane, and meaningless existence.

The self-possessed spirituality in the characters of Coelho enables them to make a sublime leap and overcome their quotidian existence. Possessing the attributes of love, power and enlightenment, all the characters of Coelho's making are essentially spiritual. Thus Coelho's characters have a world of their own, where they go through myriads of developmental phases in order to reach their goal of finding who they truly are. In an interview to *India Times News Network*, Coelho rightly states, “what I can say is that all my characters are searching for their souls, because they are my mirrors. I’m someone who is constantly trying to understand my place in the world” (*santjordi-asociados.com*)

Every pixel of the fictional cosmos that he creates is coloured with the sepia of the real world that he inhabits. Understanding Coelho as an individual, therefore, becomes a prerequisite to understand him as a novelist. Every aspect of his chequered life infuses him with the potential of a writer. The rebellious demeanour of his childhood provides him with the substance of an ultimate fighter or a “warrior of light,” as he commonly loves to call himself. His fear of the obligatory nature of Catholic practices imparts him with all the knowledge of Oriental religions viz, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and many others that he seeks refuge in. Coelho's experience with the lunatics lends him the courage to confront his own limits that he would otherwise not have dared to. An involvement with the counterculture of the hippies imparts him with a boundless freedom and helps him evolve as a non-conformist. His addiction to drugs makes him love his life in full measure and become a man of extremes. From his imprisonments Coelho borrows fortitude and comes out as one made of the sterner stuff.
The practice of black magic brings Coelho face to face with the darkest corners of his heart, that he is persuaded to dispel by his return to the Catholic faith, characterizing all his works. Besides, his occasional forays into the world of theatre, journalism, and song composition, vitally attribute to the making of a writer. So, while every phase of Coelho's life has been a reservoir withholding the prospective writer in him, what constitutes the fountain head of his writing career, is his 56 days journey on the Road to Santiago that he calls his pilgrimage. This pilgrimage becomes the subject of his first acclaimed work, *The Pilgrimage* in which the journey motif culminating into his spiritual quest sets a paradigm for all his fictional writings.

In Coelho's quest for himself through his characters, he is particularly struck by the phoniness that has overtaken the modern world. He finds that the contemporary man has resorted to pretension to rise up to the standards set for everything. Thus, in working their way towards spiritual transcendence, Coelho's characters take recourse to self-actualization, which is quite in adherence to the essence of spirituality, involving a search for the true Self. In this inward journey, they invariably come across a dual Self namely, the higher transpersonal Self and the ego directed material Self. The feminine in them necessarily applies through a prominent motif called love that unites their varying Selves and endows them with a spiritual power. Equipped with love and power they attain their true enlightened Self.

Coelho's spiritual pre-occupation comprising his quest for his Self, proclaims his treatment of spirituality very loud and clear. Spirituality for him has nothing to do with whether he believes in God or not. It is Coelho's approach to life that rightly slots him in the category of a yogi. His yogic perspective does not involve the abandonment of
anyone or the neglect of any duties. It is not divorced from life, nor does it call for any
forsaking of action. Coelho's spirituality is primarily a way of life. It is verily a
celebration of life in the right spirit. It is precisely, a switching over from a life of
purposelessness to a life of meaningfulness. In moulding one’s attitude with a new
understanding towards life, Coelho's spirituality essentially demands an efficient and
righteous performance of action. An action directed towards self-enlightenment, purges
the human soul, having set it free from the vices of the world. Through such a
spiritualization of life, the soul is brought into conscious communication with the inner
Divine Reality.

Coelho has attained the entity of a saint in the hearts and minds of his readers. He
epitomizes an ascetic Self whom his readers behold as the representation of the Divine
Self. His books do not teach any religion in particular but all religions with his
commonplace messages that can be incorporated by one and all, without necessarily
offending any creed. Throughout his works, advice or guidance is delivered as pithy
maxims and sage aphorisms like “listen to your heart” (The Alchemist 134), “wherever is
your heart, there is where you’ll find your treasure” (148). These come out as timeless
truths drawn from various classical texts and contemporary cultures. What makes them
pragmatic is the fact that these suggestions are made by the characters to the readers. In
effect, Coelho’s protagonists stand as proxy for the readers, that is why so many people
claim to visualize themselves in his novels.

Coelho’s novels articulate a form of self-help spirituality that offers working
examples of courage, adventure, and eventual success of their protagonists. These serve
as beacon of hope for the brave ones who are all set for their inner-transformation, the
metamorphosis of the Self. They are inspired to read the omens and forge through perseverance in the face of adversity. Then as they learn to trust themselves and accept that life has so much more in store for them, they gradually attain self-transformation. Moreover, being repeatedly told that “the universe conspires” to help all in realizing their dreams, the protagonists and the readers alike are assured of their eventual success. They also begin to realize the cosmic significance of their individual journey of self-discovery and inner transformation. They are the warriors of light.

According to Coelho, everyone being capable of listening to the silence of heart, of accepting failure without letting it get them down, and holding on to hope even in the face of odds, is a warrior of light. Values like, discipline, friendship, love for all, and listening to one’s heart are the equipments with which the warrior fights the battles in the name of personal growth and in the defence of light. Coelho calls it a good fight that involves the identification of warrior’s true Self and the equilibrium of his mind through inner struggle. The essence of human life, says Coelho, is found in fighting the good fight. Such inspirational thoughts scattered on every page of Coelho's fiction, teach the readers how to live as spiritual beings in the material world.

Another characteristic feature of Coelho's fictions is his use of magical words and phrases that are pulsating and full of life. One such symbol is “water” as Coelho says, “water is one of the most symbolic things, being one of the basic elements of life and creation” (Arias 149). In By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept, water represents the Great Mother, the Goddess. Like mother, water generates and sustains life. It, therefore, stands for a woman’s matchless power. The impact of this symbol is so great, that surrounded by water in the form of mist and fog, Pilar feels as pristine, as secure, as
timeless as in a mother’s womb. Thus the novel begins as a love story symbolizing the journey to the Self by following one’s dreams and ends with a moral evaluation of the Self. “Gallows” is another vital symbol used in *The Devil and Miss Prym* which brings out the human conscience and awakens the readers’ conscience. Conscience according to Coelho’s works is a camouflaged sentinel that dwells in every human being, which warns and attempts to stop any unjust behaviour. Through Chantal Coelho reminds us that “Each one of us carries a gallows inside us” (*DMP* 77). It is the gallows, namely, the conscience that helps the villagers in warding off the evil and allowing the good to prevail.

An important symbol that occurs in *The Zahir* is that of the “railway tracks.” Realizing these tracks as representative of Esther and himself, the protagonist analyses that they run parallel with a prescribed distance that has been formulated long ago. He finds that generations have lived with this formulation down the ages, considering it as an ideal one. Likewise, he feels that two people getting married must remain fixed and maintain an ideal distance throughout their married life bearing the solidity, the functional nature and the consistency of the railway tracks. Though, later on this observation is denied by Mikhail who says that the energy of love should not be curbed by laying down rules like that of the distance between the railway tracks. He believes that making rules regarding when love should or should not appear, leads to its disappearance altogether.

Coelho best explains the simple nature of his writings to *Telegraph* in these words, “Well it is not difficult for me to put my feelings into written form. I try to be
concise and to go direct to the subject. This is what people like about my work, and what the critics hate. They want more complicated book” (telegraph.co.uk).

What makes him even more lucid is the emphasis that he lays on the significance of the present. He says:

I believe neither in the importance of the future nor in the importance of the past… I do believe in the present-that we can change either the past or the future. Perhaps my characters foresee things, but they know that all these things are linked to the way that they were going to behave in the present. In any case, I think that the present is our gift. It is the most important part of our life and we can change any future that we have if we live in the present intensely. (Wyszpolski par. 32)

Coelho’s books on the whole are an amalgamation of elements from alchemy, Catholicism, medieval mysticism, ancient traditions, black magic, and the like. Broadly speaking, they combine “religious Catholicism, magical esoterism, and secular existentialism. Though largely self-taught, Coelho cites luminaries like St. Augustine, Bernhard of Clairvaux, Teilhard de Chardin, and Jorge Louis Borges or makes references on classics like the Holy Bible, The Gita, The Mahabharata, or The Koran, which shows that all his knowledge comes from books. In other words, in attempting to assimilate doctrines and perspectives of Christianity, Judaism, Taoism, Hinduism, and Islam, he combines different religious systems and clearly endorses syncretism. Like a New Age Guru, he often claims that all the world religions teach the same truth: every individual possesses an inner divinity. In his interview to Laura Sheahen, Coelho says: “I am
catholic, so religion for me is a way of having discipline and collective worship with persons who share the same mystery. But in the end all religions tend to point to the same light”(Sheahen).

In the process of writing, Coelho plunges into his soul and lets it to carve out the magnificent tales. In his quasi-autobiography *The Zahir*, Coelho describes the complex process of creative writing in him as:

Once every two years, I sit down in front of the computer, gaze out on the unknown sea of my soul, and see a few islands – ideas that have developed and which are ripe to be explored. Then I climb into my boat – called the word – and set out for the nearest island. (*Zahir* 69)

Coelho inspires his readers to follow their dreams and listen to their heart for attaining the innate joy of life. His works are the invitation to live one’s dreams, to embrace the uncertainty of life, and to rise to meet one’s own unique destiny. He invites each one of us to embark upon the course of the warrior. For him, each of his readers is a warrior of light: one who appreciates the miracle of being alive, one who accepts failure, and one whose quest leads him to become the person he wants to be. That is, one who is still able to fight for his dreams, despite his every day worries. Coelho seems to be en route to fulfilling his own destiny, although he readily admits the road has not been smooth. His books are about the common people who have the doubts of winning the battle and moments of being utterly dejected. Regardless of what happens in lives, people have to persevere, survive, and fulfil the destiny. One has to take the risks and pay the price. The marvel in the writings of Coelho is that it has an uplifting effect when one is in
a state of dejection. For him there is nothing “impossible,” it is just a misleading word. According to him, people let themselves get discouraged, not because things are impossible, but because they actually want them to be. For him the good fight or joy is present when the people are ready to bring changes in their lives. Coelho thinks that true lessons are in one’s own experiences and those experiences keep one alive. He sees his books as his way of sharing himself and his inner Self and that is why his readers feel that he understands them because they think like him. Thus, Coelho with his magical word generates awareness about things that are concealed within the Self.

“Simply put, Coelho is an author in search of himself, a trait that epitomizes his literary truth” comments the Brazilian novelist Glauco Ortolano (par. 2). Coelho’s life has in many ways been as varied and unusual as the lives of the protagonists of his internationally acclaimed novels. Like them, Coelho has followed a dream in quest for fulfilment that is his own dream to be a writer. He conveys that one must become conscious of oneself and enlighten one’s soul. Accepting the social system imposed on the Self means living a different person’s life. Thus, we discover that “Coelho's ‘writing the Self’ phenomenon becomes instrumental in ‘righting the Self’” (Joseph 66). Coelho's characters take recourse to self-actualization in their own way towards spiritual transcendence. In their undaunting search for their true Self, they uphold the essence of spirituality with them.

As a writer, Coelho believes that “The world itself has a soul, and at a certain moment, that soul acts on everyone and everything at the same time” (The Alchemist 147). And through his novels, he urges his readers to “Follow your dreams, transform your life, take the path that leads to God. Perform your miracles. Cure. Make prophecies.
Listen to your guardian angel. Transform yourself. Be a warrior, and be happy as you wage the good fight. Take risks” (*The Alchemist* 150). All these pieces of insightful thought strewn in Coelho’s novels eventually assist in the journey of one’s self-discovery, thus ensuring a permanent place for Coelho as a spiritual writer in the literary circle.