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**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF *THE ALCHEMIST* BY PAULO COELHO,
AS AN INSTANCE OF POSTMODERN SPIRITUAL REVIVAL IN
FICTION**

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Abstract

The contemporary resurgence of reviving the theme of spirituality in English literature is the pivotal concern of this paper. The selected novel, i-e, The Alchemist, by Paulo Coelho, depicts the central character's spiritual transformation. Such literary representations in a contemporary setting will cause to name it the postmodern thematic revival of spirituality. Although the collective mention of these two themes is new, it is a true endeavor to merge them. This thematic amalgamation is also named postmodern self-reflexiveness. The binary of postmodernism and spirituality is crafted and dealt with very masterly. This paper will pave the way for relevant endeavors and open new avenues for future research.

Introduction

The increasing trend of writing about the theme of spiritual transformations in fiction and, most notably in English novels, results from self-reflexiveness in literature. In the late 1980s and 1990s, many emerging writers preferred to revive the traditional concept of spirituality in modern times as an instance of self-reflexive art, which resultantly paved the way for researchers to study spirituality as a prime theme associated with the advent of postmodernism in modern English novels. The work, *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, serves the best example to study this theme. In this paper, the researcher analyzes the contemporary resurgence of reviving the theme of spirituality in English novels. To study/write about spirituality in a contemporary setting



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makes it a postmodern phenomenon. As once traditional writers dealt with spirituality in the past, then mostly left out by modern writers, as they have left it as a work of religion. Again, it asserts itself in fiction and emerges more forcefully as postmodern spirituality. The researcher has selected *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho (1988) as an instance of refreshing spirituality in a contemporary setting. In this novel, the writer revives the traditional concept of spirituality after the modern period and gets worldwide fame that depicts readers' interest. In this novel, he separates spirituality from religion. This novel is about the fulfillment of a dream through different aspects like self-exploration, heart-searching, and action, where a shepherd achieves what he is waiting for. The writer of this novel is Brazilian by birth, recognized and acknowledged by literary circles for writing as real as he experiences. In fact, this piece of fiction is a masterpiece by him.

Sawyer (2011) defines spirituality as a process of personal transformation according to subjective experience independent of any specific religious context. This definition liberates spirituality from religious bias. Bucher contributes to the stream of postmodernism and spirituality as; the interest of the people in spirituality has risen and created a 'megatrend.' This trend is of tremendous importance for literary researchers to study this blend of postmodernism and spirituality. Many writers are writing about spirituality. As M. Scott Peck, in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, deals with spirituality from a different perspective. He believes that spirituality is the growth of mind and spirit simultaneously. Paulo's spirituality in *The Alchemist* is relevant to that of Siddhartha by Harman Hesse. Both prior mentioned novels depict that spirituality is associated with the self-realization of the protagonist. The more they realize themselves, the more they grow spiritually. For him, spirituality is very hard to attain as one must have a personal revelation and stroke of enlightenment that transforms a man into a wiser being. Raja Rao's novels also deal with spirituality. For him, the very journey for the search for one's self is equal to the search for spirituality. And that journey is full of spiritual beliefs and self-confidence. Dalai Lama is also one of the contemporary writers of spirituality. For him, spirituality is a thing that is related to some qualities of the human spirit, such as love, patience,



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contentment, tolerance, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of harmony, which brings happiness to both self and others.

This return towards spirituality shows the postmodern countercurrent to the enlightenment critique and nullification of spirituality. The thinkers of Postmodernism and critique of the enlightenment have paved the way for a post-secular age in literature. The postmodernist mark for diverse interpretations and the rejection of absolutism has enabled the religious and sacred themes to occur again as postmodernism is the turn to self-reflexiveness in so-called and so-formed meta-fiction of the age, as practiced by a host of other writers. It is a move towards licensing each writer to be true in expressing oneself in writing novels. And the journeys about transformation in recent times follow this definition (Bertens). Zabala has mentioned

"the rebirth of sacred in the third millennium is motivated by the secularization of the sacred at the center of the process by which the world's civilization developed".

Lergere (1984) explores that spirituality has to go with many experiences and it is spontaneous, in comparison to religion, that is a uniquely codified understanding of one's spiritual experiences. However, some of the world researchers have identified the differences among religiosity, religiousness, and spirituality. Talking about religion and religious institutions, spirituality is not limited to formal religious institutions it is far behind them. Spirituality can also vary from individual to individual. (Paragmet, 1997; Levin, 1996). Contemporary spirituality is not 'objective reason,' but it has moved to 'subjective choices'. This general explanation of key concepts of postmodern spirituality and the developed relationship between them is advantageous to study and analyze the selected novel produced by the Brazilian author.

The significance of the study



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Through this term paper, the researcher intends to study the spiritual revival, in literature, as a prime theme associated with the advent of postmodernism. The sampling frame incorporates a selected fame work with the same thematic appeal. The prime focus of the researcher is to study the omnipresence of spirituality as different themes cloud it. Spirituality asserts itself whenever it is overshadowed. It works like a lighthouse; to guide and give meaning to people's lives. Although, a bulk of literature is available on spirituality and postmodernism separately. But this researcher has combined these two things as comparable and opts as a lens for observing the relation among postmodernism and transformational journeys in contemporary fiction. This study is essential as it helps fill the gap of spiritual writings associated with postmodernism in current settings.

Theoretical Frame and Methodology

This paper is a qualitative research project. Since this study will deal with spirituality associated with the advent of postmodernism, this paper incorporates postmodernism and spirituality as a basic theoretical stance. Postmodernism, as propounded by Lyotard, and for spirituality, guidance will be sought from ancient and modern spiritual theorists. For the purpose of sampling, the researcher has selected the novel *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. As the research pattern, this research starts with objectives and research questions. The quotations and sentences relevant to the theme and research are taken from the novel for the study. The relevance of these quotations is validated in the light of operational definition. Research articles and thesis related to the topic are also consulted.

Literature Review

This paper has three major concerns; (1) postmodernism and its relation to spirituality; (2) the definition of spirituality in a contemporary setting (3) spiritual transformational. There is no shortage of writings about postmodernism and spirituality. A number of writers from different



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countries have conducted many valuable pieces of research. In fact, a large number of books pertaining to these areas are so bewilderingly high that the researcher will have to be careful while selecting, as is very much evident from the selected bibliography.

Postmodern Spirituality

Society has lost contact with its higher memory, knowing the Big Answers to the Big Questions. It is time to restore that lost contact by transforming spiritually and regaining lost spirituality (Icke, 1994). In other words, this is super spirituality as it is outside organized religion. And makes possible to live and promote subjective life. Bruce's definition of spirituality is also a turning point as he says that postmodern spirituality is relativist and produced epistemologically. He says that current spirituality is the final stage of secularization, as it does not contain any uniting power and control mechanism. In fact, this tends to be accommodative. Quoting Bruce, the definition of spirituality is,

"A world in which individuals select from a global cafeteria of ideas, rituals and therapies that appeals to them".

To him, postmodern spirituality does not give much space for genuine inner growth and development because it involves commitment and the external guidance that it lacks. Peck in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, says he makes "no distinction between the mind and the spirit, and therefore no distinction between the process of achieving spiritual growth and mental growth". To him, they are the same.

In fact, the very definition of spirituality and religious writings are questioned by a postmodern critique by stating an "incredulity towards meta-narratives". Smith rebuts this critique. He says that postmodernism and spirituality can have a positive relationship because it is mistaken to extend postmodernist critique to religious discourse, biblical world views are not meta-physical, and last but not least postmodernist approach has some affinity/similarity with the



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religious approach. In this way, they have a more positive relationship than philosophers tend to grant it. He holds that biblical narrative does not claim to be authorized by an appeal to universal autonomous Reason but rather by an appeal to faith. He believes that religion is not a meta-narrative but an appeal to faith because the religious narrative believes faith without evidence (qtd. in Sweetman).

The Postmodern Spirituality and Individualism

The resurgence of spirituality as of late has become unmistakable in the investigation of religion. Tacey (2003) indicated that numerous new peculiarities of the present strict scene are viewed as the appearance of a resacralization/re-charm of the world or spirituality transformation. This 'arrival of the consecrated' is emotional and makes it individual religion. However, at the end of the day, the consecrated is returning in a modified structure. Colin Campbell distinguished this change in religion as the easternization of the Western social worldview (Campbell 1999). As indicated by him, this interest isn't simply the consequence of importing Eastern philosophical and strict thoughts. The agreeableness of such thoughts is acknowledged by the reorientation of the Western perspective, which had fostered various new components corresponding with Eastern way of thinking (qtd. Chase p53). Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) proposed another understanding of this 'structural change in the consecrated scene', which goes by 'the spirituality transformation'. They guarantee to be spooky by the "sacred goal" of the contemporary investigation of religion, to be specific a hypothesis that can simultaneously make sense of the downfall of certain types of the consecrated and the ascent of others: the monstrous emotional turn of present-day culture. This 'emotional dismiss' signifies 'an abandon an everyday routine experienced regarding outside or "objective" jobs, obligations, and commitments, and a turn towards an everyday routine experienced by reference to one's own abstract encounters. This 'arrival of the consecrated' is some of the time deciphered as a reaction to the pluralization of the perspectives, which has shaken the actual underpinnings of socially produced ontological security and achieved a circumstance of summed up



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vulnerability. After the disaster of the 20th century laid philosophies, shamed by the authoritarian frameworks, advancement quit any pretense of developing widely inclusive perspectives that could go about as sense-working for people. From that point forward, the talk has been an enemy of philosophy and hostile to idealism. We never again make 'stupendous accounts'. However, just recount Kiplinguesque's simply so-stories (Pricket 2002:2).

Contemporary strict independence is classified into three fundamental kinds of the assertion by Hubert Knoblauch as: (1) from existing stock, and people set up their very own religion. (2) As 'searchers', people switch between religions, each time changing their perspective or personality. (3) They at the same time harbor different strict convictions (201-2). Emile Durkheim is another persuasive example of this approach, who determines present-day independence and individualistic legalism from Christianity. Durkheim completely expresses that 'a singular strict peculiarity is gotten from "outside, indifferent and public religion". The strict independence normal for contemporary legalism might be characterized as 'the view that the singular adherent doesn't require middle people, that he has the essential obligation regarding his own spirituality predetermination, that he has the right and the obligation to come to his own associations with his God in his own particular manner and by his own effort'(Lukas 94). Paul Heelas includes the flood of strict independence as: Postmodern religion is particularly in possession of the free subject...The de-guideline of the strict domain, joined with the social accentuation on opportunity and decision, results in intermixed, interfused types of strict or "strict cum-mainstream", the life that exists past the practice of controlled church and house of prayer (5). These new types of strict life are most frequently investigated under the umbrella term of 'postmodern' or 'new' spirituality.

Spirituality in Contemporary Setting

There are nearly as many meanings of the term as there are texts about it. An extremely comprehensive definition has been proposed by Pawel Socha, who sees spirituality as 'a socioculturally organized and decided endeavor to adapt to existential human circumstances.



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Consequently deciphered, spirituality is a general human showing up in numerous common and strict structures' (Hay and Socha 2005:589). As per Bucher, the outline of a few ongoing subjective investigations of spirituality shows that today spirituality is most frequently connected with connectedness and unity, connection to God, connection to other people and to selves, paranormal encounters and capacities and self-greatness comprises ' the core of spirituality '. This new spirituality has numerous articulations and is portrayed as private, abstract, diverse, particular, postmodern, and individualistic.

Spiritual Transformation

The investigation of spirituality suitably includes attention on "experience". That experience isn't restricted to uncommon snapshots of euphoria or understanding or expressly reflection encounters like supplication and contemplation. Spirituality signifies "affected by Holy Spirit" (Holder, 2005). Being human is an excursion of becoming. Also, this excursion is long-lasting; it isn't just an aftereffect of the progression of time. Development might make human realization conceivable, yet full personhood comes just from a deep-rooted excursion of turning into that (Benner, 2012). Mankind has been held by profound amnesia that has brought us down a dull and hazardous way from which we are currently getting away. Humanity has lost contact with its higher memory; which knows the Big Answers to the Big Questions. The time has come to re-establish that lost contact by changing genuinely and recapturing lost spirituality (Icke, 1994). Spirituality change is equivalent to New Creation. (Weatherhead).

Spirituality and religion

The distinction between spirituality and religion must begin with a clear definition of spirituality. Klenke (2006) has explained:

Spirituality is often defined by what it is not. Spirituality . . . is not religion. Organized religion looks outward; depends on rites and scriptures, and tends to be dogmatic, exclusive, and narrowly based on a formalized set of beliefs and practices. Spirituality, on the other hands,



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looks inward, tends to be inclusive and more universally applicable, and embraces diverse expressions of interconnectedness (59).

Spirituality is conceptualized with two aspects connectedness and greatness, as a matter of fact. That is, it is described as a requirement for social association and the craving to layout an association with a spiritual wellspring of importance (Riaz and Normore, 2008). Dalai Lama (1999) highlighted the qualification among spirituality and religion, expressing:

Religion I take to be worried about confidence in the cases of some confidence custom, part of which is acknowledging some type of paradise or nirvana. Associated with this are strict lessons or creeds, custom supplication, etc. Spirituality, I take to be worried about those characteristics of the human soul, like love or empathy, tolerance, tolerance, pardoning, satisfaction, a feeling of obligation, and a feeling of concordance, which gives joy to both self and others. (22) Religion is described by explicit conventions and quirks, though spirituality is nonexclusive and bears the cost of pioneers a powerful quality fit for profiting by assorted conviction frameworks (Riaz & Normore, 2008).

Fairholm (1997) attested, spirituality doesn't make a difference to specific religions, although the upsides of certain religions might be essential for an individual's profound concentration. Said another way, spirituality is the melody we as a whole song. Every religion has its singer"(29) . In this manner, spirituality is fundamental for religion; however, religion isn't required for spirituality (Fry, 2003). It is likewise vital to take note of that religion and a relationship with a higher power are not totally unrelated (Covey, 2004). The main shared characteristic among spirituality and religion is a benevolent love-caring dedication to the interest of others (Fry, 2003).

In recent years, spirituality has garnered much attention in every field of life, opening up spirituality for thousand definitions. Principe is of the view that spirituality is relevant to religion. For him spirituality is inside a religious framework, a concrete and stable system of beliefs. On the other hand, Helminiak places spirituality in a broad perspective, including traditional and



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non-traditional practices and claiming to be inherent in human nature. Spirituality has irreversibly outgrown the framework of religion. In today's context, to be spiritual no longer means to be religious. It does not necessarily mean believing in God, but rather, being spiritual signifies being concerned with non-materialistic values and having a broader and deeper perspective on life. A framework of any tradition does not define these new-postmodern-spiritualities; these are spiritualities that break the boundaries and unite, at the same time creating a spiritual market in which each individual can compose a personal spirituality out of spiritual elements that answer the best of their spiritual needs and expectations.

Conclusion

This paper aims to analyze the tendency of incorporating spiritual journeys in the literature of the postmodern age. It highlights the postmodern situations that compel modern writers to write about transformational journeys of the soul once again. This paper helps identify a relationship between postmodernism and transformational narrative journeys. This paper also helps explore the spiritual potential lamented over and left out by modern writers. Postmodern writers are turning to spiritual quests and are showing a strong bond between life and spirituality. Postmodernism is all about accepting plurality because it celebrates experiments and welcomes individual work. The rise of the theme of spirituality in a contemporary setting is also one of the causes of globalization as the world is becoming a global village, and people around the world are gathering and accommodating diverse cultural traditions. The new trend of experimenting with self-reflexiveness is also in vogue and gives way to new art and themes worldwide. The researcher intends to disassociate spirituality from religion through this paper as these two seem synonymous but are not in reality. Spirituality is a personal and subjective experience that varies from individual to individual.

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