

**From Understanding to Understanding: The Self and Life  
– A Reading of the Select Novels of Paulo Coelho**

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## Chapter V

### Summation

A work of art is effectual in quality; this quality sets the work in motion which eventually awakens responses and unfolds the dynamism by evoking a sense of curiosity, awe and wonder. It becomes a phenomenological process, when the reader's response is activated and the literary work comes into existence. In the words of Wolfgang Iser, the convergence of the text and the reader brings the text to existence. In accordance with this statement the previous chapters were an exploration of the select works of Coelho to understand the various aspects of the works. In the postmodern world, a society that is beset with doubts and confusion, a condition in which all the -isms converge towards only an amorphous whole, where fuzzy logic is what keeps the people moving, literature also reflects this same attitude. The scheme of things in modern fiction reflects a vision of life in which this indeterminates feature. As Toynbee rightly said, in this age, when human society still gropes in the dark to come out of the aftermath of the two global wars followed by euphemized wars of races, religions, politics and economics, the world is not a riveted and dependable place to live. It is this scenario that is challenged by Paulo Coelho in his novels. Barry Lewis in his essay 'Postmodernism and Fiction' expresses these as governing traits of postmodern fiction: temporal disorder, the erosion of the sense of time, a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche, a foregrounding of words as fragmenting material signs, the loose association of ideas, paranoia , and vicious circles, or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse. On the contrary, it is seen in the novels of Coelho, that he tells the story of a person who is in search of

something, a treasure, in the metaphoric sense. This treasure could mean an assurance of and for life; a meaning discerned for a fulfilling life.

Coelho's novels are populated with, not the heroes of Marlowian or Shakespearean stature; not the angry young men of the turn of the century; nor the Shawian superheroes or the disgruntled, pessimistic lot who acknowledge in their lives the turbidity of the present time. His heroes are protagonists who concede and appreciate the complexity of the present and try to strike their own path to lead a fulfilling life. They are beset with doubts, but get a clarification from their way of living. They struggle in order to realise life's full potential. Another aspect of the novels taken for study are, they fall in line with the features of a traditional novel, which is bound by plot and setting and narration which makes the readers identify with every aspect of the novel. The world created in the novel is the one that has meaning and fulfilment. It is not a deranged world, and there is verisimilitude and sanity. The world is not an experimental world, where the characters experiment with living in insane conditions. The world that the author creates is the one that has a grand Narrative and people move towards satisfaction and realisation. There is no temporal disorder, but a linear timescale, in which the characters move forward towards their goal.

The stories taken for study are not a potpourri or a jumbled mess of various ingredients that make up a story. Instead there is neat storytelling, a character on a mission, while in it, finds himself or herself in demanding but energising and inspiring circumstances which gives him or her the strength to move forward and arrive at a meaningful conclusion. So there is no fragmentation, which is a predominant feature of postmodern fiction. Neither the characters who enliven the story, or the story itself has any uncertainty or is inconclusive. Adding to this is, the characters do not suffer a

paranoia, which is yet another feature of postmodern novels. As Tony Tanner, in his *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-70*, says, in postmodern fiction “the protagonists suffer from a dread that someone is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action”(15).

Given this background of postmodern ideology, the literature of the times is incongruent and dystopic, doubt laden and fearsome. But in the works of Coelho there is a sense of understanding, a wholesomeness and definiteness about life.

The objective of the research was to analyse how the characters reach an understanding of life through the principles of hermeneutics which helps decrypt the encrypted message in the story, examine the life of the people in the novel through the different aspects of psychosynthesis. The characters attain a synthesis within themselves and how this leads to humanistic social work. Humanistic psychology lays emphasis on the potential of the individuals to rise above the dull and sundry and achieve satisfaction. Abraham Maslow’s need theory is based on the principle of humanistic psychology that every person aspires to satisfy themselves and the highest satisfaction is derived from self-actualization or self-realisation. In the study, it is proved that the characters do attain this self actualisation and they are also able to help others in this process. The intervention of one in the life of the other positively to help the other to actually realise his or her dream becomes humanistic social work.

In the introductory chapter is the biographical details of the author. Born in a very strict catholic family, the author was a non-conformist even from the beginning. His passion for writing was evident when he won a prize for writing poetry. Despite his parents’ discontent in him choosing a literary career, he has become one of the most read

authors of the century. His third book *The Alchemist* (TA) published in 1988 won the Guinness Book of World records for the most translated novel. The scheme of the research thesis as stated in the hypothesis is to disprove that present postmodern condition, including literature, is devoid of any interpretation. It is proved with the principles of hermeneutics, psychosynthesis and humanistic social work that Coelho's works are of a sturdy nature. They are the stories of people who dream and leave no stone unturned in order to realise the dream.

The chapter titled 'Interpreting Life through the Prism of Hermeneutics' focuses on the hermeneutic principle and discusses how hermeneutic methods help to understand a literary work and to break the era's illusions so that humanity can reach its possibilities as it is revealed in the works. Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation is concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the results of such actions. As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for resourcefully treating problems of the interpretation of human actions and behaviour. The stories taken for study talk about people who are in the process of finding themselves. This understanding and finding themselves is the beginning of the quest. There is an underlying behaviour in the seekers. This is being analysed with the help of the analytical tool termed as the Hermeneutic loop. First there is an attempt to understand the whole life. In order to understand Life, a questioning attitude is required. This attitude helps in understanding the need for the meaning of an event - the past. This is vital based on the presumption that it is from the past that the present emerges. This questioning attitude can be realised only through freedom that is taken to act and speak. To get cognisance of any event or thought, questions need to be raised. The result is an insightful

engagement with the phenomenon called Life. While in such an engagement, the feedback from the past challenges the understanding of the whole which in turn triggers reflection.

There is a reinterpretation which results in a greater understanding of Life.

Hermeneutics can be considered as an act of integrating various aspects of an information or an event or a thought to arrive at an uncondensed meaning. Though New Criticism, with its structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives, denies the existence of authorial intent in the understanding of the text, and places importance on the reader and his response to the text, the intention of the author cannot be denied or passed over. Interpretation of the text expands the vision and the reader is successful in getting at the ethos of the author by means of the text.

Starting from the Biblical hermeneutics, with the emphasis on the literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical interpretation, the humanistic tendency of the Renaissance and the Reformation periods laid emphasis on the understanding of the texts for a better life. Hermeneutics as an ideology to understand the texts was initiated by thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. Dilthey is of the opinion that interpretation is based on experience, expression and comprehension of the mind of the mind of the author as well as the reader. This becomes an important aspect in the Heideggerian interpretation. The analysis of the novels are based on the hermeneutic loop. First proposed by German philosopher Friedrich Ast, the hermeneutic circle bases its assumption that interpretation of any text is circular. It builds up the relationship between different parts of the text with the whole as such. Different parts of the text include the characters, the setting, the events and the whole is the interaction among these. Every

thought and action of the characters in the text is looked at from a different stance and the reader gets a new perspective of life.

The novels taken for study are analysed based on these considerations. *The Alchemist*, which shot the author to instant fame, is the story of an Andalusian shepherd boy Santiago. He gets a recurrent dream of treasure in a far off land. He has to understand the meaning of this dream to move further in life. When he seeks the help of the old woman of Tarifa, who is considered as the interpreter of dreams, his freedom to follow his instinct is observed. This is confirmed when she tells him to follow his dream and go to a distant land of Egypt, where his treasure is supposed to be. As he understands that he has the freedom to pursue his dream, he should also develop the calibre to realise the same. He has to engage himself in the actual phenomenon called Life. He has to learn the configuration of life so that he would be able to enjoy his treasure. His meeting with the King of Salem, Melchizedek, becomes the next important step. His association with Melchizedek, even if it was for a few days, was rewarding. His faith in religion is strengthened so also his belief in the omens. Urim and Thummim, the white and black stones, are signs of omens which The King of Salem gives Santiago. His apprenticeship with the crystal merchant, and making the business grow with his novel ideas are a sure sign that he is learning the lessons of life by active engagement with it. When he realises that he has to move forward, he sets off in a caravan to Egypt, where the treasure is supposed to be. It is a challenge, and he ultimately has to accept this. The Englishman, the Alchemist, the camel driver, tribesmen, the chieftain, and finally Fatima all assure him that Life is a grand festival and he has to live every moment to enjoy. The alchemy is not in turning base metals, but in living each moment, accepting all the challenges. Finally, when he realises that the treasure is under

the sycamore tree he understands life is always a win-win situation. Every loss or a setback is eventually a gain as it becomes a lesson.

In *The Pilgrimage*, Coelho is engaged in finding the sword which metaphorically is the power. He has been parading himself that he has learnt everything and would be ordained as Magus, the Master and win the sword. But, to his surprise, when he is about to get it, the sword slips away and instead, it is his wife who wins the sword. He has to undertake a journey along the Road of the Spades, the medieval route to Spain, the road to Santiago de Compostela. He will be guided by Petrus, who will be his Master and Coelho has to pledge complete obedience to the Master. He was in a happy delirium of pride that he assured himself that winning the sword is a cakewalk. He has to free himself from this pride and engage himself in the phenomenon called Life. So this journey becomes fundamental to his understanding of life. As Petrus teaches him the various exercises it becomes the engagement with life. The seed exercise teaches him what growth is. Just as the seed breaks open the hard crust of the earth, against the force of gravity, he should also not be crippled by the various trammels. The speed exercise teaches him the importance of observation in our mission of life. This exercise is to walk as slowly as possible. Walking slowly helps one not only to look at things around and enjoy but also to be aware of the importance of Time. The third exercise, the cruelty exercise teaches the strength of love. The water exercise is to channelize intuitions which, when believed, provide solutions in difficult situations. The next is the ritual of agape, the Blue sphere exercise. Agape is the highest and the purest form of love. Enthusiasm is one of its manifestations. Enthusiasm in everything that one does is being aware that one is alive.



The next is the buried alive exercise, it is experiencing death. Death too becomes a manifestation of enthusiasm. It reaffirms our faith in oneself and helps in the celebration of life. These exercises trigger contemplation and cogitation and are a demonstration of the beauty of life. Finally Coelho has to find his sword alone, which is again in a small chapel. Only after undergoing these arduous exercises is he able to find the sword. Just as Santiago had to undergo many hardships before understanding what the treasure is, Coelho too understands what life is and the power and beauty of life after much struggle.

*The Zahir* is the story of the search for a meaning for life. The author had just started his career in writing. One day when his wife, to whom he owes everything, disappears he is not able to understand the meaning of the event. He has to first understand their relationship to find out the reason for her disappearance. She was a war correspondent, so the threat for her life was imminent, but he had to know where the real threat was. The police enquiry and the guesses of the Press, as he was becoming a prominent author took him to the next level of the loop, to raise questions on their relationship. He was very sure that their relationship was perfect and could not believe that she could leave him for any reason. He did not realise at that stage love could not be taken for granted. His meeting with Mikhail, opened scores of assumptions that were proved otherwise. Mikhail spoke to him about love which, as believed in Kazakhstan, was a wild force and the wildness a feminine quality. It cannot be tamed, lest it destroys us. That is what had happened to the author. This feedback from Mikhail shakes him out of his slumber. When Mikhail urges him to attend the meetings where people share their experiences not only makes him understand the meaning of love. The meaning he had ascribed to love and help is being challenged here and he should discern the real meaning. Mikhail takes him to the group of beggars who are

beggars by choice. It is not so much that they beg for their sustenance, but they teach the important lesson that all of us are beggars in terms of love and spirituality. Esther had wanted him to understand this. She had wanted him to understand that love cannot be given as charity. It has to be earned and so it has to be valued and cherished.

The blood stained cloth that everyone, whom he encounters in his search for his wife, has, becomes another symbol of love that he has not understood. As he realises that he alone does not possess, he is shaken out of his complacent attitude and is reminded of the story of the two firemen: the face of one clean and the other dirty. The clean face thought he was dirty and the dirty face thought he was clean, because they were seeing the other person. He realised if he had to see her he should cleanse himself of all the unwanted attitudes and assumptions. Only after preparing himself for that event, could he meet her. He found his Zahir, somebody whom he cannot avoid or be without. Only after much reflection and reinterpretation of the meaning of life was he able to find his Zahir.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, the meaning of life is reasserted. Veronika decides to die because she did not find life meaningful or interesting. She was bored of the monotony of life. She attempts to end her life by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. Ironically and fortunately she wakes up in a mental asylum Villette where she finds Zedka, Mari and Eduard among a host of other supposedly mentally imbalanced lot. Her engagement with the people in Villette not only raises in her the need to find out why she did not die or what was in store for her for the future but also the various facets of life and living meaningfully. When she is diagnosed with heart disease and given seven or more days to live, she understands the worth of life. Mari helps her in realising how ineffectual man made laws are, and that if laws can be relative, it can be subjective too and so there is no

one ultimate law. So life has to be lived conscientiously, with empathy and love.

Veronika is able to understand what the passion towards art is through Eduard. He was stamped as a schizophrenic because he saw visions of Paradise. He drew these visions of Paradise, when his parents wanted to groom him as a diplomat. He recognised the artist in Veronika when she played the piano and wanted her to play for him. Though this was seen as abnormal by the doctors in the asylum, Zedka, Mari and Veronika understood the satisfaction that Eduard was able to find in music. For Zedka, the loveless, matter of fact life that she was leading with her husband and children had taken its toll and she was stressed out and suffered depression.

In Villette she was able to reconsider her life. She was able to do this when she took up astral journeys. Neuroscience terms it an imbalance, but for her it gave an insight into the kind of life that people were living and the kind of life that she wanted to live. It gave her the needed consolation. Mari had understood the inefficiency of laws and legal practice. Her association with the inmates of Villette gave her time to ponder over her life and she decided to live a meaningful life by serving the needy. She would give herself a second chance in life and live to her fullest potential. All the four, when they left Villette had engaged in the phenomenon called life and reinterpreted life to make it meaningful.

*The Devil and Miss Prym* is a challenging story of the Good against the Evil. Miss Prym's colourless life in the small village of Viscos is stirred by the coming of the stranger with the Devil on his shoulders. She wants her life to be busy, creative and challenging. When the stranger confronts her with the bars of gold as the prize for committing the sin of murder, she has to tackle the real challenge. If she has to understand her real moral stature, she has to free herself from the mundane life.

This necessitates her meeting the stranger and accepting the wager, though the stranger gives her no choice. For the stranger, such a catch 22 situation is needed if God's ways have to be justified. He had lost everything, his family and fortune for no fault of his. In this situation all the people of Viscos help them in reinterpreting their meaning of life. When everything is set to the killing of Berta, the widow, Chantal refuses to pull the trigger and be an accomplice in the murder. She reminds the people of Viscos of the guillotine turned into a cross because of the goodness of the people. The cross stands for sacrifice and love. The challenge that was posed not only to Chantal but to the villagers as well, wakes them out of their nonchalance and the final turn in the event helps them understand the meaning of the Cross as established by Ahab when he restructured the village of Viscos.

*By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is the story of spiritual realisation. Pilar, like the other protagonists of Coelho, had been leading a usual life with its dreams and disappointments. Like any other, she too was waiting for an opportunity that would give a golden touch to her life, fulfilling and meaningful. She responds to the letter from her childhood friend, who was now a spiritual and a charismatic leader, and becomes her need to free herself from this taken for granted life and find a meaning to her life. When she met him at Madrid, he was addressing an animated crowd, extolling the power of the Virgin. From then on she and her friend both involve themselves in the phenomenon of life. Both have to understand each other. As she had silently nurtured passive love towards him and wanted to marry him and settle down in life as any ordinary woman. As she accompanies him to places she comes to know of his conviction towards Christian faith and to the concept of the Immaculate. She witnesses his power to perform miracles,

especially his power to heal. She is apprehensive that she might lose him. She is also in a dilemma, if she is right in wanting him to herself when he has the Divine gift of healing multitudes. She is surprised when the Father requests her to take him away from this life because it is very difficult. He has to live a very hard life, forsaking everything, and living only for the sake of others.

When she had almost decided to give him up, her love for him got the better of her. She resolves that she can marry him and still be a partner to him in serving people. But he on the other hand, had after much thought decided to give up that power to the Virgin Herself, and lead an ordinary life with her. This came as a shock to Pilar and she almost left him. But days of reflection brought back to her the faith in God and in him too. When he comes to her, she accepts him. He gives her the hope that the Virgin would always give him a second chance. So, both of them, in their arduous and pious journey of love understood each other and that they will be living together.

The chapter titled 'Psychosynthesis – Synthesis Realised' is based on the psychological principle of Roberto Assagioli. Psychosynthesis is a therapeutic approach which recognises the individual's need to synthesise various aspects of the self and personality to arrive at the harmony of mind and body. Given the pluridimensional character of human personality, it entails within itself the conflicting nature of the Id, the Ego and the Superego. These conflicts have to be resolved in order that in this fragmented world, a wholesome life can be experienced. Applying the tool of psychosynthesis, designed by Roberto Assagioli, the mystery behind a meaningful life is unravelled, thus proving that life has meaning and it is within each one's capacity to understand that. Psychosynthesis marks four stages to achieve a harmonious inner integration, a true self-realisation and

right relationship with others. The novels prove to be examples of people who stand at the fork of their lives and situations which compel them to succumb or precipitate them with doubt. These four principles help them to unravel the mystery and achieve a harmonious integration, a true self-realisation and the right relationship with whom they have to journey in life.

The shepherd boy Santiago, in *The Alchemist*, tries to understand the recurrent dream of treasure found somewhere. The treasure becomes his Personal Legend and he has to strive to realise this. When he decided to become a shepherd so that he could seek the world, though his parents wanted him to be ordained and serve God, he had understood his personality. He could not seek God within the four walls of the seminary. His dream becomes the motivating factor to go out into the world and seek adventure. As he decides to plunge into the world of experience, he meets people who will further this adventure in seeking meaning to his dream. The interpreter of dreams, the old woman, The King of Salem, Melchizedek, the wool merchant's daughter, the crystal merchant, the caravan driver, the Englishman, the Alchemist, Fatima, all these people are sources of his adventure. They set his road for synthesis. The interpreter of dreams tells him to go to Egypt to find the treasure. Egypt is a far off place. He needs not only money but help in various ways to go to Egypt. But he will do it as the old woman demands from him one tenth of the treasure. This is a sure indication that he will find the treasure. He feels a soft love towards the wool merchant's daughter. During his previous visits, he had impressed her with his books and stories. This adventure to Egypt will definitely provide him with more stories to attract her attention. Melchizedek, the King of Salem is a very powerful influence on him. It is he who teaches him to take control of the situations.

With his advice on the principle of favourability, Melchizedek, he ensures Santiago that the pursuit of his dream is the most important aspect of his life. His words, “when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it” (Coelho, *TA* 23). The Urim and Thummim , the black and white stones to read the omens that he gives, the story of the boy with the oil in the spoon, all these show Santiago that the journey to the treasure may be difficult but worth its try and also important. The crystal merchant, with his compromised dream of going to Mecca is a reassurance of keeping the dream alive.

The Englishman, on his search for the Alchemist, to study alchemy shows the worth of real alchemy of life. The Alchemist teaches him the meaning of alchemy and he prepares Santiago to sponge up the qualities that are needed to understand the real alchemy. The caravan driver, the tribesmen, teach him the value of life. When driven to a situation where he has to speak to the wind, he does and to his own amazement, he exhibits the power of having control over his personality. It is a clear proof that he has learnt the lesson taught by Melchizedek, to value the omens and brave any situation. Fatima teaches him patience and endurance just as she had patiently waited for him so long and would wait for him in future too. Finally he rediscovers himself, and that is when he is able to understand that the treasure of his dreams is the experience he has gained and will be gaining. He achieves a synthesis of his personality.

*The Pilgrimage* is the story of his pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Coelho understands he has to discover his true self when the sword, the symbol of being the Master in RAM practice slips away from him and is given to his wife. He has to find the sword again. He has to reconstruct his personality to win the sword. He sets out on the pilgrimage to the Cathedral. The process for acquiring the sword are the different

stages of the synthesis of his personality. It is also a spiritual journey to discover himself. When he meets Petrus, his guide, he is made aware of the shortcomings in his personality and the need to reconstitute it in order to create a unifying centre. He understands this when he almost fell prey to the Devil, whom he mistook for the guide. The first lesson to be cautious is learnt. As he travels with the Guide, he is taught various exercises, each one of them unique and with a specific purpose. The seed exercise helps him to understand the need to break the shackles to emerge victorious. Just like a seed, which breaks open the earth's crust to see the light of the day and grow, the personality should be allowed to grow imbibing everything from Nature. The speed exercise teaches him the value of time and the need for observation. Awareness of things around is important for any accomplishment. The Intuition exercise and the Blue Sphere exercise teach Coelho the power of intuition and its connection with the soul. This is a very important factor in synthesising all energies manifested and felt through the body. The exercise of death and climbing the waterfall help Coelho further in psychosynthesis. At last Petrus leaves him to find the sword himself. This is because Coelho has now become a reconstructed individual who has the power within himself for self-actualization.

In *The Zahir*, the story of his discovery as a writer, the synthesis is achieved when he is able to understand the real meaning of love. When his wife, who he knows loves him very much, and would never leave him for anybody or anything else, has simply disappeared from his life, it is time for him to understand his personality and come to terms with it by accepting his shortcomings. In his meeting with Mikhail, the translator from Kazakhstan, he finds answers to many of his questions. Mikhail invites him to his weekly meetings where certain basic questions about life are raised and answered.



Though reluctant at first, Coelho understands that it is important for him to attend the meetings if he has to get an answer to his wife's disappearance. His conscious self assures him that his love for his wife is real, true and immense. So he could not conclude on the reason for her leaving him. He had taken things for granted. His association with Mikhail clears him of his understanding of love. Mikhail made him understand true love. When he met with the accident he understood the meaning of the story of the two firemen. The man with the dirty face thought he was clean, because he saw the clean face of his friend. But the clean faced man thought he was dirty because he saw the dirty face of his friend. Coelho also had been seeing the clean faces of Esther and his other true friends and was of the thought that nothing was wrong with him. He realised that he had to clean himself before he met his wife. This fact is further ascertained with the blood stained cloth. Most of his friends, Mikhail, the beggars and the doctor who treated him had a bit of blood stained cloth. This is of utmost relevance and importance. This cloth was given to Esther by a dying soldier at the warfront as a symbol of love. Esther had given a bit of this to those whom she thought had understood what real love is. But she had not given it to him. As he realised this aspect of his personality he felt a coordination of his energies and he is fully ripe to meet her. A synthesis of all his attributes is felt and he meets his Zahir, to continue to live with her with renewed energy of love.

*The Devil and Miss Prym* is the story of the battle between the Good and the Evil. The wager between the Good and Evil is enacted through the stranger's visit to Viscos, a small village, to tempt people to commit the sin of murder. The stranger has a valid reason for initiating this speculation. He was in the arms and ammunition business, doing an honest job. But suddenly he lost everything, his business and his family for no fault of

his. He questioned his idea of life and wanted to test if people are good or bad inherently. This test is not only to find the answer to the troubling question but also to find out who he was? What sort of a person was he? This knowledge is the prerequisite for understanding one's personality. He goes to Viscos, a small village, where people are naive and not much business is done every day as he had seen in the world, to put his question to test. Miss Chantal Prym, an orphan, and a well-wisher of the village also has to understand herself because the interaction between the stranger and her, makes the story. She too has to understand herself to come out of the make belief world, that the world outside Viscos is entertaining and exciting. The wager is now set, bars of gold for murder. When this proposition is set before Miss Prym, she takes charge of the various aspects of hers. She seems to fall prey to the temptation, but then she starts considering the options. Will it be a profitable bet or lead her to danger? The situations that both find themselves in help in reconstructing their personality.

The stranger, whom the widow Berta considers a Devil, becomes a sort of a pivot. The whole village finds itself churned when they come to know of this bet. Slowly, Miss Prym gathers courage to prove that it is good that precipitates in the life of the people. After much deliberation, Berta is chosen as the scapegoat. But at the appointed moment, Miss Prym refused to pull the trigger. It is not saving Berta as such, it is saving the village of Viscos and proving that it is the Good that will always win. She discovers herself when he decides to go against the villagers. For the stranger, it is not so much the loss of the gold bars but it is gaining his personality. Both find themselves in a win-win situation having achieved the synthesis of their personality.

Chantal Prym and the stranger, the two principal characters, find themselves as opposing forces, but with the same sort of a dilemma. Chantal Prym finds life in Viscos boring and unrewarding. The stranger feels he was punished unreasonably by God. She wants to go out of Viscos and find a life challenging and fruitful. The stranger comes to Viscos to find out if people there will fall prey to his wager. They both need to reassure themselves of their goodness. The gold bars as a wager for committing the murder becomes the pivot around which they will realise their personalities. When she accepts the wager of winning the gold by urging the villagers to commit a murder, she actually is in the process of controlling these elements of personality which are contradictory and act as impediments to growth. From now, she questions the morality of things. The first step is revealing the plan of the stranger to the people and warning them of the aftermath if they were to accept the wager. When the elders of the village like the Mayor and the Pastor zero in on Berta, the widow to be the scapegoat, she seems to be an accomplice. She reminds herself of Ahab, the reformer of the villager, and the guillotine, turned Cross. On the particular day, when everyone are gathered to commit the murder, to pull the trigger of the gun, Devil seemed to have won. But Miss Prym refuses to pull the trigger, and sets another line where people who do not want to be a part of the crime can fall in. To the surprise of the entire crowd, all of them except a few go behind Miss Prym. With her association with the stranger, she is able to realise her true personality, which she had not realised so long. The stranger's doubts are cleared and his eternal questions are answered. The people of Viscos are the proof for the goodness of human nature. They realise a synthesis of their personalities.

*Veronika Decides to Die* is a beautiful story of a young woman, who did not find life interesting enough to live and so commits suicide. In this story, of the three conscious levels, the lower, the middle and the higher, the lower consciousness which has the pathological manifestations seems to be predominant in Veronika. She decides to take her life as she is not able to manage her emotional conflicts. Her future is not secure so she feels what Will Parfitt terms as “crisis of existence” (Parfitt, 181). In order that a synthesis happens in her personality a situation has to be created. This situation happens when she finds herself in Villette, the mental asylum along with Zedka, Mari and Eduard. Each of them are unique in their way that they are not able to conform to the accepted norms of the society. Zedka suffers from depression because she is not able to live a healthy life with her husband and children as she is troubled by her past. Mari suffers from headaches. Eduard, wants to pursue his passion in arts, while his parents groom for diplomatic service. All these four characters have to find a unifying centre to discover themselves once again. They find this at Villette in the company of each other. When they help each other just by being with each other and listening to each other, they are able to find a solution to their problems. Veronika wants to live because she had understood the love of Eduard. Eduard is cured of his schizophrenia when he finds people who understand his visions of Paradise. Zedka goes out of Villette to find a new life. Mari decides to spend her life serving the needy. Thus Villette becomes a sort of centre where they are able to focus on their personalities without the arbitrariness or the compulsion of the outside society. When they are able to channelize their energy in what they feel gives them satisfaction, their personalities are synthesised and they emerge as new human beings wanting to live life to the fullest.

*By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is the story of spiritual reawakening. Young Pilar, who was leading an unrecognised life, receives a letter from her childhood friend to go over to Madrid. When she meets him her life changes ultimately. She had been nursing a delicate love for him since her childhood. She did not have the courage to show her love due to the mundane activities she had engaged herself in. Now is the time for her to rethink about herself and her life. When she meets him, he is in the midst of a lecture on the Immaculate and the feminine perspective of God. She was not sure if she had made the right decision. She is also told about him performing miracles and healing the sick. As they travel, she is able to discover the different sides of both of them. She loves him, she realises, as he is. She fears she will not be accepted. She overcomes all her fears when she makes him break the glass, symbolic of breaking all the barriers that prove to be impediments. She is moving towards a synthesis and takes her friend also along with her. If they have to journey their life together, both should understand themselves and each other.

When the Father of the seminary wants her to take him with her, it is a surprise, but also an assurance that she has chosen the right path. On his part, he fears his Divine gift of performing miracles. So in order to lead a life filled with love for her, he decides to give up the gift to the Virgin Herself. This is a shock to her, and leaves him. The different aspects of her personality need to be unified, and this happens. She finds herself in a Convent where she is given a notebook by the Sister to write whatever she feels. She understands her need to reorient herself. He too understands that love does not prevent anyone from being obliged to God and serving people. Their personalities undergo a reconstruction and are synthesised.

The chapter 'Humanistic Social Work – Value of Life' scans the novels taken for study from a social work perspective. In the process of interpreting the text, various factors are considered to get at the core of the novel. Psychological probe is also attempted to decode the meaning. While doing so, it was found that the characters interacting with each other by way of helping each other akins to the credo of social work in which people need some sort of an intervention from other participants of the society for a moral and social healthy life. In this attempt of intervening when there is a necessity, the members of a society help each other in attaining the higher order need of self-esteem and self-actualization. As stated by Malcolm Payne the core principles of humanistic social work are creativity , spirituality, feeling and giving a sense of security and being resilient and being accountable and flexible. It is found that in the course of the study of the novels the characters help each other so that their needs are satisfied.

In *The Alchemist*, Santiago has to go out into the world to seek his treasure and to realise his personal legend. Santiago's creativity is evident here and spirituality is not in confining oneself to any religious order. It is seeking the best in oneself to realise the true potential. His dream of a treasure in the far off lands takes him to the old lady who interprets dreams. When the old lady urges him to go to the Pyramids of Egypt to find the treasure it becomes an act of intervention to lead the subject towards a goal. His association with the King of Salem, Melchizedeck, is a very powerful influence on him. He impacts Santiago with his ideas on omens and instinct. His stories like the boy with the spoon of oil makes Santiago understand the need to be open to the surroundings at the same time not to forget the mission of life. Urim and Thummim, the two stones that he gives Santiago to read the omens become a very powerful influence. It gives Santiago a

sense of security and makes him resilient even when he loses everything, including the two stones. His association with the crystal merchant teaches him how to be accountable for one's actions and accept life as it comes. On his journey to the Pyramids with the caravan, the Englishman who is in search of the real Alchemist, the Alchemist himself, the tribesmen, the chieftain, finally Fatima, all of them intervene in his association with life. All these influences prove to be a social work intervention as they come at the time of need and help Santiago to move forward in life.

In *The Pilgrimage* the needed social work intervention happens when he undertakes the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the Cathedral in Spain. The pilgrimage becomes a necessity as he has to win the sword which he lost because of his pride. He has to humble himself to win the power symbolised by the sword. He has to journey to the Cathedral in the route of the common man. Along the route he faces ordeals which have to be overcome and the lessons have to be learnt from them. His guide, Petrus, is the interventionist who takes him through the winding path of recovery. When he accepts the proposal that he will be guided by the Master, he is humbled. When Petrus saved him from the Devil he understood the need to be spiritually awake. Throughout the journey, Petrus gives him the feeling of security and the exercises that he teaches makes Coelho resilient. He earns the knowledge and courage to face any situation. Even death would not frighten him as he experiences death in the Death exercise. This allows him to earn a new perspective of life itself. All these exercises, experiences and the wise thoughts shared by Petrus makes him eligible to earn the sword. In life each one has to find the meaning of life alone. So having given all the necessary strength, Petrus leaves Coelho in the final stage of his search. This is so because Coelho has to be accountable in life for whatever he does.

The relationship between the author and Petrus is that of the social work interventionist and the client. Finally the client is able to look at life with a renewed energy and protean perspective.

*The Zahir* is the story of finding his Zahir, something or someone without which and whom one cannot be. Coelho had earned the fame as a novelist and he seems to be basking in the newfound fame. He has to realise his vocation and his personality in order that his esteem needs will be fulfilled. When he finds his wife simply disappears one day, and the attention that this event invites from the public, makes him reconsider his view of life and his relationship with his wife. The transformation happens when he meets Mikhail, the young translator whom his wife knew. This association becomes the social work intervention. Coelho needs to come out of his beliefs that hamper his growth as an individual. It is the mirror that shows who we are. The story of the two firemen becomes relevant here. Coelho has to clean himself in order that he will find her. The meetings that Coelho attends at the Armenian restaurant, where Mikhail introduces him to so many people, becomes an eye-opener to him. He understands the meaning of living. It becomes a spiritual awakening too. This change comes over him when he has to wait in the traffic on his way to the Cathedral. Just as the Cathedral had withstood all the structural changes down the centuries, human beings also need to undergo the systemic changes to get them nearer to God. The blood stained cloth is another evidence of his lack of proper understanding. Mikhail tells him that Esther had given a bit of the stained cloth to each one of them when she was sure of their understanding of love and life. The association with Mikhail, the doctor who treats Coelho when the latter met with an accident, the beggars who Mikhail introduced, Humanistic social work tries to make people realise



their higher order needs. Mikhail tells him the whereabouts of Esther only when he is ready in all ways, understands the real meaning of love and to live a fulfilled life. His association with all these people makes him resilient to face life with all its challenges just as his wife.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, the needed social work intervention happens when Veronika finds herself in Villette, the mental asylum. She is in the mental asylum because she attempted suicide. She was considered to be a mentally imbalanced person as she consciously had made an attempt on her life. The reason that she was bored with life is a poignant one, the treatment that she gets at Villette does not consider this aspect. But the other inmates help her in letting her understand the meaning of life. Zedka makes her understand that she has to decide how to live her life. Zedka was dissatisfied with the mundane life. She had left her family to live with her lover, but came back only to be diagnosed with depression. Though she was not mad, she was sent to Villette. An overdose of insulin with which she is treated takes her on astral journeys. She is able to look at life from above and arrive at a resolution. She has to decide how to live. The same is the case with Mari, the lawyer. She suffers from nervous breakdowns and she understands that law is arbitrary and does not validate any right or wrong of life. Finally she decides to go out of Villette and serve the needy. Eduard, the schizophrenic, is in the asylum because he envisions Paradise when his parents dream of a diplomatic service. Though all the four are in this mental asylum for four different reasons, the common factor is they are dissatisfied with life. In the asylum, they find each other's company to be highly generative and they feel a sense of security which they had not felt earlier. When they help each other they actually initiate the intervention that is needed for

regeneration. By the time they leave Villette they have developed a sense of resilience that will enable them to move forward in life. They had been cured of their boredom and felt secure as they decided to live life according to their wish and not according to the norms dictated by the society.

*The Devil and Miss Prym* is about the eternal battle between the Good and the Evil prevalent in this world. This is dramatized in the form of the wager that is set by the stranger who visits the small village of Viscos. This wager is accepted by Miss Chantal Prym only to be proved that Good will always prevail over Evil. Both the stranger and Miss Prym prove to be interventionists to each other. Miss Prym wanted to go out of the village in search of an adventurous life. The stranger comes to the village to find an answer to his question whether people are inherently good or bad. It is imperative for him to find the answer because he feels he is wronged. He was an arms dealer doing honest business. But suddenly he finds his family destroyed for no fault of his. He starts speculating on the inherent quality of Man. He chose Viscos to test his proposition. On arriving at Viscos he chose Miss Prym as his agent. Miss Prym becomes not his agent but the interventionist and He too becomes the same to her. She has to realise that life is not running away from duties but accepting the challenges and being truthful to everybody whose contribution makes life meaningful. Berta, the old widow, is a purposeful social worker here. Even without leaving her porch she is able to influence Miss Prym that brings about all the change in the latter. When Miss Prym tells of the purpose of the stranger's visit to Viscos, all the villagers seem to accept the wager as they need a change in their life. They felt this was the much needed change. Even for the Pastor it seemed God given. The villagers were regular church goers, but they were not spiritual. Religion

was for them just another activity in life. They feared God more than they understood Him. Ahab, the reformer, with the guillotine and the Cross was one reason. But now faced with this situation of committing the sin of murder in exchange for God was a test, which they almost failed. But Miss Prynne's interference becomes the needed intervention. When she refuses to pull the trigger to murder Berta, a silent revolution happens which reforms everyone. Miss Prynne stood for the goodness of humanity and the stranger, while losing the wager has actually won. He understands the goodness inherent in human beings and that God's ways are beyond scrutiny.

*By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* is the story of the discovery of the spiritual self of two lovers Pilar and her beloved. Pilar is excited when she receives the message from her childhood friend to meet him, she was not aware that this meeting would be a life changing experience. Humanistic social work practice prescribed creativity, spirituality and resilience to bring about the needed change in the lives of people who need help. When Pilar meets her boyfriend she is surprised to find that he is not the same childhood friend. She learns that he will enter into the seminary, and he has become a votary of the Virgin. He talks eloquently of the Feminine power to the ecstasy of his listeners. She wonders if he will accept her love and be satisfied to settle down for a routine life. Journeying together creates a new awakening in Pilar; she grows spiritually. She makes him understand that he has to come out of anything that seems to bind the growth in the episode of breaking the glass. Despite all this, she nurses a fear if she was curtailing his gift for healing and performing miracles. To her surprise the Father of the seminary tells her to marry him and not to let him be what he is. The reason he gives is, life will be very difficult for him in the seminary. On the other hand, he wants to

marry her and settle down for a beautiful life. Like the husband and the wife in the story of *The Gift of the Magi*, both seem to sacrifice for the sake of the other. She is ready to give him up for the spiritual life that he wants to lead. He is ready to give up the Divine gift for her sake. The needed intervention happens when she comes to know that he had given up this Divine gift. She understands that they both can still lead a beautiful life without compromising on the spiritual knowledge that they have gained. When they accept each other hoping that the Virgin will always give them a second chance, they have enriched their lives with spirituality that gives them the power to be resilient.

Coelho is rightly called as the Brazilian wordsmith for good reason. The lucidity with which he writes is unsurpassed. He is a storyteller. He tells his stories in such a compelling manner that the readers have no other option but to journey along with him through the story. He does this with simple language and with simple grammatical structures. The author uses only simple or compound sentences to talk about the profound philosophy of life. To cite an example, Santiago makes a life's decision. He had to follow his dreams and it is for which he had struggled so hard and come so far. The twists of experience made him bid goodbye to the crystal merchant and the crystal merchant said in simple language, "You brought a new feeling to my crystal shop. But you know that I'm not going to go to Mecca. Just as you're not going to buy your sheep" (Coelho, *TA* 63). As Chen, Jui and Rudd, Phil, in their analysis of Coelho's language feel. Understanding these details empowers readers with a different vision to explore the literature. It enables forensic linguists to investigate a crime. It facilitates computational linguistics to create artificial intelligence. Most importantly, it is these details that amplify our ability to see human complexity, and broaden our intellectual horizons.

He is a master storyteller and the simple narration is the magic that makes his readers trust this story teller. He says in an interview, “Don’t try to innovate storytelling, tell a good story and it is magical. I see people trying to work so much in style, finding different ways to tell the same thing. It’s like fashion. Style is the dress, but the dress does not dictate what is inside the dress.” (Ferris 25.58:26.30)

Honesty is another feature of Coelho’s writing. He is brutally honest and lays bare his soul. That is the reason for the readers to journey along with him through the stories. Most of his stories have an autobiographical element subtly running through. His experiences and values guide him through the pages. This creates a magical connection between the reader and the author. When Santiago wanted to go out into the world, travel, rather than become a priest as his father wanted, his father quickly gave him a solution that is to become a shepherd. “Amongst us, the only ones who travel are the shepherds.” “Well, then I’ll be a shepherd.” “The father said no more” (Coelho, *TA* 9). The father blessed his son. Coelho is writing about his own dream of becoming a writer, one thing that was bothering him throughout his younger days and for which he had to struggle a lot. He writes about what he values most in life, the freedom to ‘be’. It resonates with the desire of almost everyone who wants to pursue their personal legend. This is the reason for the story to have so many admirers. Each of the stories taken for analysis, is the story of a personal legend like winning the sword, or understanding his wife to metaphorically find her or like Veronika to live according to one’s own standards ethically and legally by not submitting to the undue pressures of the world.

Another feature of these novels are the effective use of symbols. A symbol is a setting, object, character, or event in a story that carries more than the literal meaning and

therefore represents something significant to understanding the meaning of a work of literature. Symbols always have a literal or concrete meaning and a figurative or abstract meaning. Conventional symbols have a previously agreed upon meaning. In the novels taken for study, the travel becomes a very poignant symbol. Santiago wants to travel, wants to see the world. The concept of travel extends beyond the literal meaning and symbolises the search, the experience gained by the search is the treasure. The Pyramids of Egypt, where the treasure is supposed to be. The majestic and grand Pyramids visualised at long distance is the symbol of the majesty of life when properly understood. It is this understanding that Santiago learns at the end of the journey. In *Devil and Miss Pym*, again the travel is a symbol just as the gold bars are. The stranger travels to Viscos in order to test if human beings are inherently good or bad. Travel also has within itself everything that is new. Here the people of Viscos are new to him. And he gained vital experience in Viscos. The gold represents temptation, which is the pivot of the story. In *By the River Piedra I sat Down and Wept*, most of the story happens while in travel. Pilar travels from her place to Madrid. From there they both travel to France. It is during these travels that they understand each other. It is the travel that solves the inner conflict and makes them understand life and accept each other. The Pilgrimage, as the title itself suggests, the journey. The travel becomes obligatory for the author, if he has to win the sword, the sword being the symbol of power. Power without the knowledge to use it wisely will lead a person nowhere. It is the pilgrimage that teaches the author the lesson.

Another interesting aspect of Coelho's novels is that he makes the characters representational. Often, they do not have names, rather the titles of the roles they play. The interpreter of dreams in Tangiers, who sets the ball for Santiago roll, is just the

interpreter of dreams. The crystal merchant is just the crystal merchant; likewise the Englishman who wants to study alchemy and the Alchemist. In *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, the narrator does not name the man whom she falls in love with.

The readers identify him with what he represents, love, the inner struggle and as the votary of the feminine side of God. In *The Devil and Miss Prym*, the stranger who comes to find the answer for the eternal question of Good against the Evil, he is just the strange; so also the mayor's wife, the landlady, the Priest. The readers are able to link the behaviour of each person to the character's title and the role that they play in the story.

Iser in his "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" says "A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative" (208). This is the feeling that any reader of Coelho gets while reading his novels. The statements, claims the observations and the information given in the stories are the component parts. There is such a dynamism in their engagement that they aim at something beyond what they actually say. The sentence correlations which according to Husserl are objectives and purposes make significant impact on the reader and the reader is able to see a perspective in the light of his complex anticipations from the text. The researcher found herself involved in finding out that 'beyond' and a virtual dimension of the text is established. The complex anticipations are fulfilled by reality that is created by the author and "the reality of the reading experience illuminates the basic pattern of real experience" (Iser 212).

The objective of the research was to find out how the characters in the novels taken for study are able to reach an understanding of life. This is proved with the help of

three ideologies, hermeneutics, psychosynthesis and humanistic social work. On the basis of the hermeneutic loop, the stories are interpreted. This interpretation is further enhanced with the principle of psychosynthesis. The principle of psychosynthesis was used to analyse the synthesis that the characters are able to realise in their interpretation of life. The understanding and attaining the synthesis helps the characters to move beyond their personal lives and help others in reaching an understanding of life and living it to the best of their abilities. Thus the humanistic social work principle is also worked out among the characters. The aim of the research was to prove that Coelho, though a postmodern writer, has shown, through his stories, that life can be wholesome and awe inspiring. Thus the hypothesis to prove that in the postmodern culture Paulo Coelho's stories are of people who live a well meant life and are worthy to be followed.

In the interview with Ariana Huffington for Huffington Post, Coelho had said, life is measured by two metrics, money and power, but there is also a third metric which is the capacity to wonder at the mystery called life. Every novel of Coelho holds so much up the sleeve. All the novels of Coelho talk about a journey. The novels can be studied as georafiction. His women characters are powerful catalysts for other characters to emerge fully and give ample scope for study.

Coelho is a great admirer of Indian Culture. He shared his views on India with Shekar Gupta at Davos, Switzerland during the World Economic Forum Meet 2006. He said India teaches tolerance and Indian way of life is intensely spiritual. He said one of his songs that he wrote when he was a lyricist was based on the Gita. According to the historian Romila Thapar, one of the objectives of literature is to win the past to the present and light up the self. (Thapar 0.49:0.52) The writer should expand, go beyond the



self and imagine a different experience which allows the self to transcend and acquire self-knowledge. It is this quality that the researcher saw in the works of Coelho.

The reading of the novels of Coelho thus results in the understanding of the Self and Life.