

*Abstract*

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The dissertation entitled *From Understanding to Understanding: The Self and Life – A Reading of the Select Novels of Paulo Coelho* seeks to prove the subversion of postmodern features in the select novels of Paulo Coelho.

Paulo Coelho, without doubt, is one of the most popular and influential novelist of the present times. While the postmodern cult presents man as a fragmented piece, buffeted within himself with the questions of meaning of existence and the society which is intangible, Paulo Coelho, proves with his stories that man's search for a meaning in life is rewarded. His characters do not stop with understanding and finding a meaning to their lives but go further in helping others to attain this realisation as well. They integrate themselves into the society, of which they are a part of, by recognising their responsibilities and thereby contribute to the universal good.

To prove this aspect, a speculative structure was outlined based on the canons of hermeneutics, psychosynthesis and humanistic social work. Heidegger's hermeneutic loop, Roberto Assagioli's framework for psychosynthesis and Malcolm Payne's basis for humanistic social work was comprehensively considered for this purpose.

The novels chosen for this research are *The Alchemist*, *The Pilgrimage*, *The Zahir*, *Veronika Decides to Die*, *The Devil and Miss Prym* and *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*.

The introductory chapter (Chapter I) entitled "Paulo Coelho, the Enigma Unveiled" deals with the principles that govern the literature of today, various theories through which literature is understood, with specific reference to the ideology of

postmodernism and its significance in literature. It also gives an overall view of Paulo Coelho, the man and the writer. The methodology adopted to decipher his works in the light of postmodern ideology is also discussed.

Chapter II entitled “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 behavior. 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 behavior in the seekers. This is being analyzed with the help of the analytical tool termed as the Hermeneutic loop.

First a question is raised; there arises the need for the meaning of an event. The event is a part of life. This event creates a need for freedom and it is projected through action or speech. This leads on to the Engagement with the phenomenon called Life in which there are many parts. This engagement with parts elicits feedback which challenges our understanding of the whole. This challenge in turn triggers reflection, reinterpretation and a greater understanding. This Understanding is the Whole of Life. Finally the congruence between the parts and the whole is arrived at.

In chapter III titled “Psychosynthesis - Synthesis Realised” the principle of psychosynthesis is explored to show that in this fragmented world, a wholesome life can be experienced. The novels stated above 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. Applying the tool of psychosynthesis, designed by Roberto Assagioli, the mystery behind meaning full life is unraveled, 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-realization and right relationship with others. The first is a thorough knowledge of one's personality. The second is the control of various elements followed by the realisation of one's true self which leads to the discovery or creation of a unifying center. Finally psychosynthesis happens as there is the formation or reconstruction of the personality around a new center. The thesis by the application of these principles discerns how Paulo Coelho's characters reach this realization. It becomes a systematic study.

Chapter IV titled "Humanistic Social Work – Value of Life" deals with the result that emanates from psychosynthesis, a principle which leads to humanistic social work. Humanistic social work is a beneficiary of humanistic psychology. The chapter explores how the principles of humanistic social work, creativity in human life and practice, developing self and spirituality, developing security and resilience, accountability and flexibility and complexity in human life and practice, are realized in the works and the changes that the characters experience as a result of understanding

Chapter V, "Summation", finalizes the argument that, in the postmodern era of disillusionment and disenchantment, Paulo Coelho is one writer whose philosophy of life is not just a theory but a working principle. The chapter also concentrates on the author's style of writing, how his style of direct narration is congruent to the principles of hermeneutics, psychosynthesis and humanistic social work. The chapter also mentions the further scope for research on the author.