

Chapter I

Introduction – Paulo Coelho, the Enigma Unveiled

Literature is a record of knowledge and entertainment that has social, political, psychological and spiritual implications. It is an art form that impacts society for a formidable change. It is a creative process and is an imprint of the creator's personality. It is a product of life and is about life. Literary works have been influential in bringing about remarkable societal changes.

Brazilian Literature is the literature written in Portuguese language by the Brazilians, before and after its independence in 1822 from Portugal. Brazilian literature is finding new literary trends in the present literary scenario, finding its authenticity in truly Brazilian themes, carving for itself a definite space in world literature and not as an adjunct of Latin American literature. Some of the notable Brazilian writers include Machado de Assis, Guimaraes Rosa, Jorge Amado, Clarice Lispector, and Graciliano Ramos and literary critics such as Antonio Candidi and Otto Maria Carpeaux. Remarkable feature of these writers is that the stories of contemporary Brazil, its loneliness, and political turmoils are told in a compelling manner with a blend of magical realism. Ferriera Gullar, one of the most acclaimed poets of the century, had been nominated for the Nobel Prize in 2002.

Paulo Coelho is one of the most influential writers of the present century transcending the geographical boundary of Brazil. His stories are not mere lives of people, but of those who learn the meaning of life. He was born to very devout catholic parents Pedro Coelho de Souza and Lygia de Souza on August twenty fourth 1947. Even when he was born, he had defied the ordinary norms of existence. He was thought dead as the

collarbone of the infant had snapped. But the nun, the only person they could get at that time to perform the funeral rites, heard a faint mewling sound from the child and he was alive. “He had faced his first challenge and survived it” (Morais 38). He was put in St. Ignatius, the most famous Jesuit school for boys, after a lot of struggle, in Rio, which guaranteed one thing that the parents wanted for their son, strict discipline. He could do well only in the entrance exam and after that the graph of his educational competence shows only a downward curve and the 8.3 that he scored in the entrance exam was probably the first and the last of his having scored marks to the expectations of his parents. “As he himself remarked many years later, that mark of 8.3 was his final act in the world of the normal” (Morais 45).

Coelho developed the habit of writing letters and keeping a personal diary. He did not fare well in the coming years at St. Ignatius and scored only enough to keep him at school. But he started reading voraciously, of course not what the Jesuits wanted the students to read but adventure stories and novels. His parents hoped that despite his failure in studies their son would become a good Christian, and their hopes were not belied. He would attend the Sunday mass happily in his best clothes and became familiar with the enigmatic rituals. This could be the reason for his ardent belief in the rituals that led him to be a member of a great fraternity known as “the Tradition” (Coelho, *TP 1*) that has members from the esoteric orders from all over the world. He made his parents happy when he decided to go on a retreat held by the school. The retreat became a very significant period for Coelho and also the time when he would understand the meaning of faith. This is one of the remarkable features of Coelho as a person and that which pervades all his works. The notes that he wrote during the time validates the value of the spiritual retreat.

Here, I've completely forgotten the world, I've forgotten that I'm going to fail in maths, I've forgotten that Botafogo is top of the league and I've forgotten that I'm going to spend next week on the island of Itaipu. But I feel that with every moment spent forgetting, I'm learning to understand the world better. I'm going back to a world that I didn't understand before and which I hated, but which the retreat has taught me to love and understand. I've learnt here to see the beauty that lies in a piece of grass and in a stone. In short. I've learnt how to live. (Morais 60)

Coelho had learnt to develop the most important virtue that would take him through the ups and downs of his later life, faith. In an interview with Brendon Burchard, he says how important faith in one's life is. During his school days he read anything and everything and his views on the works were very candid like his review on the play *Bontinha, mas Ordinaria* by Nelson Rodrigues. "It is said that he's a slave to the public, but I don't agree. He was born for this type of literature, and it is not the people who are making him write" (Morais 61). Coelho showed first signs of a literary slant in him when he was fourteen years of age, which would later become an obsession in him. When he won the first prize in the poetry writing competition, conducted by Academy of Letters of St. Ignatius, he decided that his one and only vocation would be to become a writer. But he was disappointed, as his parents would not approve of him becoming a writer and he wrote in his diary just one line, "Mama is stupid. Papa is a fool" (Morais 5). After a not so promising childhood and adolescence, he was sent to study engineering in which he could not succeed. His growing manhood years saw some escapades in love. As the strict parents could not understand his love for writing, he was enrolled in an engineering college.

Coelho's poor performance in Andrews and his involvement in an accident which led to the hospitalisation of another boy, led his parents to think about his mental status and decided he should be. He was sent to Dr. Benjamin Gomes for treatment at Dr. Eiras' clinic. It was not only an asylum but a neurological, cardiological and a detox clinic for alcoholics and drug addicts. After twenty eight days of stay in the hospital, the hospital records claimed that he was a patient with “. . . schizoid tendencies. Averse to social and living contact. He prefers solitary activities. He is incapable of expressing his feelings or of experiencing pleasure” (Morais 1). But for Coelho it was an experience even if it was a bad one. He took it as a chance to “. . . mature and gain self-confidence, to make more careful study of my friends and notice things I'd never really thought about before. Now I'm a man” (Morais 101).

Later he tried his hand in the theatre. Grupo Destaque, an actors' cooperative group, gave him the opportunity to appear on the stage for a dramatised version of a children's classic *Pinocchio*. Even if it was to appear just during the change of scenes Coelho felt heavenly. His appearances on the stage were well received by the audience, who were mostly children. He improvised upon his acting every time he made his appearance and he came to be recognised as an actor. Though his parents would not approve of this because for them “. . .the world of the theatre was a 'den of homosexuals, communists, drug addicts and idlers'” (Morais 1009). But they gave in and even attended the show. Coelho enrolled in a law college, but the artist in him could not compromise to study law. After being a newspaper reporter for a short while, he became a lyricist for a famous Brazilian song writer and singer Raul Seixas. The duo was a phenomenal success.

The few fruitful years in the world of music were interrupted by his sudden arrest by the Communist regime of Brazil. He was found guilty of unsolicited material in his songs.

Coelho met Cissa, as she was popularly known, when he was working for Philips. After a short period of courtship they were married. And everything seemed fine, but only to change. She discovered that she could not share her life with Coelho and she left. As his biographer Morais writes, Coelho's emotional stability lay with the women he chose to live with, failure of this marriage shook him and he realised, rather he could turn his attention to writing rather than worry about the reason for the break. By this time he was in London, and he met Christina and their relationship ended in a fruitful marriage which would last till date.

Coelho's love for writing took the better of him, and he published his first book *Hell Archives* in 1982, but it did not make him noticed as a writer. He took a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in 1986 and he recorded his feelings adding to it the spice that is needed to transform a writing into an impactful book with emotion and truth. He published this book *The Pilgrimage* in 1987. It appeared to be a failure which led him to procrastinate further. Finally when Harper Collins signed the contract to publish and the world saw another writer whose impact on the reading public cannot be questioned. He wrote *The Alchemist* in 1988 and its success story is testified with the selling of more than one million and two hundred copies and translated into fifty two languages. His corpus of works include *The Brida* (1990), *The Supreme Gift* (1991), *The Valkyries* (1992), *Maktub* (1994), *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* (1994), *The Fifth Mountain* (1996), *Manual of the Warrior of Light* (1997), *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998), *The Devil and Miss Prym* (2000), *Eleven Minutes* (2000), *The Zahir* (2005), *Like the Flowing River*

(2006), *The Witch of Portobello* (2006), *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008), *Aleph* (2010), *Manuscript Found in Accra* (2012), *Adultery* (2014), *Hippie* (2018), and *The Archer* (2020). Put together his books have sold over 320 million copies and have been translated into eighty languages. Four of his books, *The Alchemist*, *The Fifth Mountain*, *Eleven Minutes*, and *Veronika Decides to Die* have been made into movies. Along with Kobe Bryant, the basket player who died in a helicopter crash in 2020, Coelho had started to write a children's book. But he decided to delete the entire draft after the tragic incident. In 2018, it was announced in Screen Daily, that he had signed for a television series with Fremantle Media based on the characters of his novels, *The Devil and Miss Prym*, *Brida*, and *The Witch of Portobello*.

Coelho has a website, a blog page and a Myspace page. The Paulo Coelho Institute, a non-profit organisation funded mainly from the royalties of the author, is in the service of helping the underprivileged, especially children of Brazil. He has won many awards and is considered as one of the most significant writers on this earth. In 2016, UK based company Richtopia listed Paulo Coelho as number two among the two hundred most influential writers of the present age. Some of the awards and recognitions that Coelho received are Knight of Arts and Letters (1996), Golden Book Award (1995-2000), and 2004, World Economic Forum Crystal Award (1999), Crystal Mirror Award (2000), Nielsen Gold Book Award (2004), The Corine International Award for Best Fiction (2002), Kiklop Literary Award Hit of the Year (2006), The Religion Communicators Council Wilbur Award (2006), Hans Christian Andersen Award (2007), United Nations Messenger of Peace (2007), and Ambassador of the European Union for

Intercultural Dialogue (2008). UNESCO has recognised him as the Special Counsellor for Intercultural Dialogues and Spiritual Convergences.

Romila Thapar, a renowned historian, in an interview to the NDTV remarked that, illumination of the soul is one of the goals of literature. This is what Coelho does through his novels. The various themes that he handles, stream down to one, to understand the self. From Santiago to the stranger, who is supposed to be the devil, and come to disrupt the peace of the nonchalant village of Viscos, all the characters develop towards knowing who they are. Within the leitmotif of realisation comes the aspect of conflict within oneself and with the world, introspection leading to understanding and self against society. All these themes work out resulting in the transformation of the individual who can lead this life as well as possible which is the dream of every human being. This journey of makeover is not without its inherent challenges and difficulties, since it is a journey towards destiny. Coelho, in an interview with Brendon Burchard, says, “Once you take destiny in your hands you are responsible for everything.” (Burchard 15.32:15.36) And then it is realised. Again to Oprah Winfrey he said “You are here to honour the miracle of life.” (Winfrey 0.40:0.44)

The aim of this research is to show how in the 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 research aims to prove that the postmodern literature is not bereft of life changing works.

The objective of the research is to analyse how a. the characters reach an understanding of life through the principles of hermeneutics which helps decode the

encrypted message in the story b. to examine the life of the people in the novel through the different aspects of psychosynthesis and c. to prove that finally that the different aspects of the personality of the characters are synthesised to understand and face the challenges of life. d. This understanding makes them help each other which becomes to humanistic social work.

The novels taken for study are *The Alchemist* (1988), *The Pilgrimage* (1987), *The Zahir* (2005), *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* (1994), *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998), and *The Devil and Miss Prym* (2000). The last three are said to be a trilogy as the events of the story happen within seven days.

The Alchemist (TA), the story which shot the author to immortal fame, is the story of a shepherd boy Santiago, who travels from Spain, pursuing his dream of finding the treasure in the pyramids of Egypt. For him, his sheep are his close companions. Just as he understands them, they also seem to understand him. The interpreter of dreams, the old woman, says that if he has to go to Egypt to find the treasure he has to go. This implies there is no other way to find the treasure. It becomes imperative that he should discover a means to find this treasure. Pursuing the dream is the Personal Legend. The King of Salem, Melchizedek, triggers the curiosity in him to pursue his dream. If it is a recurrent dream, then it should come true.

Santiago is left with no option other than to trail his dream. He sells his sheep to pay for his travel. Through the journey, he becomes an apprentice at the crystal merchant. He helps the merchant to profit as never before by renovating the shop and by selling tea in crystal ware, which is something that no one had thought of before. It is not only the physical renovation, but a psychological and spiritual reformation as well. But all the

while his dream is kept alive. The crystal merchant serves as a foil to the aspiration of Santiago. When the merchant says, he too had dreamt of going to Mecca, an obligation that every Muslim has to fulfil in his lifetime, but he cannot leave the shop, it is his destiny that he has accepted. This is another motivation for Santiago to keep his destiny alive.

The Pilgrimage (TP) is the story of the pilgrimage undertaken by the author to the cathedral of Saint Compostela in Spain. He had wanted to become a writer but procrastinated the duty under some pretext. His wife forcibly puts him on the journey to Spain. He is also a member of RAM. As a member, he has to find the sword which is the symbol of power and knowledge. When he is about to receive the sword from his Master, it slips away from his hand and is given to his wife instead. He realises that he has neither the power nor the knowledge to possess the sword. He has to earn wisdom. Thus begins his journey to Spain. He will be accompanied by a guide who will be his master too till he finds the sword. The master Petrus teaches him various life lessons like patience, faith, endurance and the value of love through various exercises. Finally he becomes fit enough to possess the sword.

The Zahir (TZ) is the story of self discovery as a storyteller and as a human being who is responsible for his activities and his indebtedness to the world at large. Coelho introduces the concept of Favour Bank. It is a store house of favours which each of us have contributed. Every human is obliged to others. It is not a condition involving money but involving higher and finer sensibilities which are essential for a meaningful life. By adding to the account in the Favour Bank one realises the efficacy of love and human kindness and this is done behind the silhouette of finding his wife who suddenly disappears. She is a war correspondent and the nature of her work takes her to places

involving risk and curiosity. When he meets Mikhail, a person from Kazakhstan, who seems to have known his wife too well, the process of finding himself and his wife, literally, begins. Coelho's association with him, to find his wife, takes him into the contours of understanding what true love is, love that cannot be circumscribed geographically, politically, or even economically. He understands why his wife left him, but not forever. She had given him the needed time to understand the meaning of love. He has to understand that, "love is a force to make us happy" (TZ 92) and not to make one a slave of the other. When he finally meets her in Kazakhstan, both are ready to accept each other in their lives.

Veronika Decides to Die (VDD) is the story of Veronica who is bored of life. Coelho gives an insight into how a fulfilling life can be lived. Veronica decides to put an end to her life because she has no good reason to live. She understands how to live in the mental asylum that she finds herself in, when she is saved. Zedka, Mari and Eduard help her to understand this. Each one was in the asylum for the same reason, but in different circumstances. In the asylum, Vilete, they help each other to arrive at an understanding. Coelho analyses the core of the perennial human problem- boredom and madness. The world harps on conformity. It expects everybody to conform with everybody and Veronica realises the happiness that people profess is fake, "How much solitude, bitterness and resignation lies beneath the surface of happiness" (Coelho, *VDD* 21). Vilete served as a place to understand themselves and others as well. Confined inside the walls, and being under treatment for supposed mental derangement, they were able to understand what they needed - freedom to be. They learn to be "It is what you are, not what others make of you" (Coelho, *VDD* 91). Finally they do get the real freedom.

The Devil and Miss Prym (TDMP) is yet another story of discovering moral fortitude. In an interview to Huffington Post, Coelho said that one has to respect the fact that we live in a mystery because the angel and the devil seem peeping alternatively into our lives every moment. Chantal Prym is a young woman in the nonchalant village of Viscos, leading a very perfect lacklustre life. Innately she prefers an adventurous life but Viscos does not seem to offer any. When the stranger appears on the scene, she expects an adventure, as any young woman would, but it turns out to be one that tested her faith in fellow beings. She is lured with gold if she makes the commandment, 'Thou shall not kill' false. The stranger comes to Viscos to test the faith of humanity, having suffered betrayal from the society to whom he was loyal. He had been an honest gun dealer, but his family was the price he had to pay for his honesty. So he decides to check if people are really true by nature. He chose the nonchalant village of Viscos, which has a meagre population and would be the ideal place for testing. After much deliberation, the people decided on the victim, the widow, the reason being that she is the only person without any commitments. It is very intriguing that it is the widow who sees the devil in the stranger when he enters Viscos. The lure of gold is irresistible and Chantal would have fallen prey, thanks to the good nature of humanity. Despite all the arrangements made, the way in which this supposed murder should take place, Chantal acts otherwise. This act of bravery, to act against the will of the people of Viscos, saves humanity from doom. It is thus proved that even during trying circumstances; it is the love for people that will win against any temptation.

By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept (BRP) again is the story of faith. The characters are Pilar and her friend. Pilar suddenly receives a letter from him to go over to

Madrid. He is her childhood friend and she has been nursing an unidentified love for him. She also finds him to be an ardent devotee of the feminine side of God. Another interesting quality that she discovers in him is his ability to perform miracles. Miracles do get meaning only when backed by faith. God could perform miracles because He is the Absolute. But in the lover, it is absolute faith in God that has given this power. Both suffer conflicts within themselves. She wonders if he will accept her. When she sees the crowd listening and applauding him as he speaks about love of God and humanity, she finds him to be a different person from whom she had known. Pilar also heard that he was in the seminary. This totally made her give up hope to unite with him in life. But the Pastor tells her to help him by accepting him. Performing miracles drains him and if he has to be saved, he should give up this power. This can happen only if he marries. But Pilar realises, his power to perform miracles and save the needy is more important and pertinent than marrying him and leading an ordinary life. He felt that he had to sacrifice this power to his love. But both of them understand that love of God does not need any sacrifice, she understands that true love accepts everything, and one needs to have courage to love truly.

In *Contemporary Literary Theory Made Easy*, while referring to Terry Eagleton's essay, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism", the editor Dr. WS Kottiswari opines that "the present, according to postmodernism, is devoid of ethical or political interpretation. Postmodern theory is therefore hostile to the hermeneutic principle" (110). It is evident from these stories that Coelho is immune to the cold and nebulous features of postmodernism. His stories are those of people who have struggled to achieve something. Santiago has a personal legend, which is the fulfilment of his dream. Santiago

understands that experience is the treasure and the alchemy which transforms experiences into lessons of life. The pilgrim, the author, learns to be a Magus, the Master, which he has to become and also deserves. It is the difficulties that one faces which help in understanding the true meaning of life. The pilgrimage is not so much a religious endeavour, but learning, learning to know what to do with the rewards that one is blessed with. He understands the miracle of transforming what to do with what one believes in. He believes in his powers as a Magus. The power has to be utilised in the right way. The power is just the ability to do things and this has to be done in the right way, forgetting all the unworthiness and taking the legitimate pride in being 'me'. The pilgrim learns to discover his strength and use his powers. *The Zahir*, again, is the story of discovering the writer and the commitment that each one of us have towards others, which again the postmodern world negates. *Veronika Decides to Die*, *The Devil and Miss Prym*, and *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* are the stories of understanding life in all its complexities. The characters understand themselves and in turn understand life at large.

Literature is impressionistic in the sense that it becomes the sponge which absorbs all the influences and impressions that a person feels and comes across. As literature has grown and evolved through the ages, the present society is even more impressionistic as the knowledge gained in the past centuries has made modern man a pot of confusion that he needs to look at himself to find out who he is. An unquenchable quest is created in him to find out the rationale for his existence. The postmodern world posits the question of man's position in it. Postmodernism as a concept has emerged in all fields of knowledge. It is mostly understood as a rejection of everything that is modern. Stuart Sim in his essay 'The Modern, the Postmodern and the Post-Postmodern' refers to what Rudolf Pannwitz

description of postmodernism as the “militaristic and anti-humanistic culture” (Sim viii) that developed after 1917. Sim further reiterates this view with the famous historian Arnold Toynbee’s remark in *A Study of History* where he says that in an age that is marked by the result of the two world wars, there is a weakening in ethos and has become a place less secure to live in.

Postmodern cult talks about man as a fragmented piece who searches for an answer for his existence in the intangible world. There is that existential morbidity that makes a person, who is not capable of finding a solution, come to terms with it, and accept life as it comes. There is no bringing together all the different threads of his personality and arriving at a synthesis when he will be a whole Man and not just a fragmented piece of flesh, blood and mind.

In this context the Literature of the present age seems to accept this bizarre condition as the representation of life. But in the writings of Coelho, the reader can discern a sense of definiteness. He creates a world where there is the grand narrative and everything falls into its place. There is a quest for meaning for life and the characters do arrive at the meaning.

The research statement is that there is a postmodern subversion in the novels of Coelho. The characters undergo a mind boggling exercise of finding out who they are and what their purpose in this grand world is. Coelho fills the world with such circumstances that will bring out in them the essential qualities of man, the indomitable will to succeed and make this earth a better place to live. There is not the acceptance of life because of inability or succumbing to it because of weakness, of feeling alienated because nothing is familiar. Coelho shows a world where struggle leads to victory. It is the victory as that of

any hero of the past, the victory over the weak forces within him in order to make his life meaningful. When this understanding happens there is what psychologists call as Psychosynthesis. In a wider sense it is the synthesising function of the ego or the development of an integrated and harmonious personality.

This synthesis is proved with the help of the psychological perspectives, hermeneutics and psycho synthesis. This leads to the aspect of humanistic psychology which explores the idea of realisation and expression of one's capabilities and creativity. Literature and psychology are inseparable. If literature is considered as the mirror of life, psychology is the mercurial catalyst for the cause of that literature.

Psychology begins with the self of the individual, an understanding, the experience of the self and identity. Every individual has certain potentials and every individual is in the process of constant development, growing and realising the potential that is within him. Every individual looks for meaning in life and recognises certain values in life. Each individual is confronted by choices and decisions, and along with it, the responsibility that it entails. The awareness of the motivation determines these choices. The recognition of the depth and seriousness of human life, the anxiety and the fear which envelopes our lives, the need to face, overcome and win over that fear- leads to that synthesis. There is the emphasis on the future and of its dynamic role in the present. This synthesis again leads to the recognition of the uniqueness of every individual.

The present, according to postmodernism, is devoid of ethical or political interpretation. Postmodern theory is hostile to the hermeneutic principle. Using the framework of principles of Hermeneutics, Psychosynthesis, and Humanistic social work the thesis is an attempt to disprove this statement.

The thesis is titled, “From Understanding to Understanding: The Self and Life - A Reading of the Select Novels of Paulo Coelho” and is divided into three core chapters along with the chapters of introduction and summation.

While trying to understand the essence of Coelho’s philosophy of life as elicited through his novels, and the interpretation of the same by other researchers, the research gap is being identified. Hence the review of literature becomes vital.

Manju Muraleedharan in her article on “Multi - Disciplinary Dimensions in Paulo Coelho’s Novel *The Alchemist*” talks about Coelho’s handling of history, geography, philosophy, theology, psychology and mythology in the pursuit of one’s dreams.

Afsana Mousume in her article “Paulo Coelho - Postmodern Aesop” traces the pattern of storytelling by Coelho that is similar to Aesop's fables. With the intention of giving appropriate life lessons, guiding people towards a fruitful and meaningful life, Aesop’s fables have been accepted by people globally as stories of moral guidance. Coelho’s stories too offer people valuable lessons of life like faith in God and humanity.

In “Eco-Critical Approach to Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*” Pradeep H. Makwana traces the ecological awareness that is present in the novel. Conformity to the environment is the fundamental attribute required in the present day. The novel talks about the conformity of all the elements of this universe to make a meaningful life. Makwana calls it an earth centred approach.

Dr. Bindu Ann Philip in her article titled, “The Power Beyond the Physique” analyses the novel from a different perspective - nature as a powerful force. Love is also a powerful force. Love of treasure, which sent Santiago on a trail, and in this trail is

included the love for Fatimah, his soul mate, love for wisdom, which is kindled by Melchizedek, the King of Salem, the love to earn to live, which is nurtured by his association with the crystal merchant and the love of Nature which makes him talk to the wind and save his life.

Haekal Shidqi in his “Psychoanalytical Study of *The Alchemist*” traces the part by id, the unconscious psychic component, the ego, which gratifies the wishes of the id in conforming to the societal needs and the superego which works on the principle of morality in the life of Santiago, which together help him find the treasure.

Samragngi Roy, in his, quite interesting article “Purposeful Distraction: Analysing the Significance of Dust ‘staub’ and Distraction ‘zerstreuung’ in *The Alchemist* and *Brida*” subverts the meaning hitherto associated with distraction. He argues the word distraction has by default has a negative connotation of a state of being disinterested and inability to pay attention. But in *The Alchemist*, the author argues, dreams, omens, Melchizedek, the merchant’s daughter, the crystal merchant are all distractions which help Santiago move forward towards finding the treasure.

Researcher Vijayalakshmi of the Nagarjuna University in her thesis entitled “Literary Techniques of Paulo Coelho A Select Study” has studied the different techniques handled by Paulo Coelho in his novels. The researcher has attempted to show how with the employment of literary devices like symbolism and magic realism the author is able to universalise the protagonist’s experience in life.

Sonia Soni in her research paper titled “Life Realised through Riddles: A Study of Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist* ” talks about Paulo's conception of life as riddle and in solving the riddle various life lessons are learnt.

Anna Pavlova Murta, in her doctoral dissertation titled “Paulo Coelho: Transnational Literature, Popular Culture, and Postmodernism”, has analysed the reader’s response to the narratives of Paulo Coelho to their native cultures. The dissertation explores the different narrative elements such as authorial audience, settings, characters structure in relation to the major themes such as self-realisation, journey cultural hybridity with respect to transnational audience and their correlation with postmodernism, globalisation and others.

It is deemed that studies have been carried out on *The Alchemist*. The researcher was not able to find any study on interpretation through the principles of hermeneutics and psychological synthesis leading to humanistic social work attitude. So the research is an attempt to study the selected novels of Paulo Coelho in the light of these above said perspectives.

Postmodernism and postmodern conditions have become a clichéd expression today. Stuart Sim in his essay “Postmodernism and Philosophy” states that postmodernism can be understood as a condition of life where there are no certainties but only scepticism. This condition has evolved because the grand narratives of Western Culture have lost their credibility. Not only philosophies that gave validity to life were negated, but the emergence of various discourses like deconstruction, which includes post structuralism, ensured this scepticism. Post structuralism questions the cultural and linguistic certainties that are manifested in structuralism. Structuralism in linguistics takes its cue from Saussure’s idea that language is sign oriented. The signifier and the signified formed a meaning in the Saussure’s linguistic model. A “relative stability” (Sim 4) could be discerned in the language which helped ascertain the meaning, a more or less acceptable

meaning in the linguistic world. Claude Levi-Strauss could determine a meaning in the cultural narrative which again gave a cohesion and strength to the beliefs of the participants of the culture. When Derrida proposed his idea of deconstruction, meaning of language in use became a transient and transitory phenomenon. Derrida disputes the meaning of a word as present in the speaker which prevents the establishment of any meaning.

Another thinker who contested the organised structure in any system is Michel Foucault. He, with his interest in the marginalised groups, such as emigrants and prisoners, showed the influence of power play in societies, how the domineering section of any society can impose its influence on others. Another major influential voice of postmodern philosophy is Jean-Francois Lyotard. According to him knowledge is the source of power and whoever controls knowledge exerts political power too. Lyotard opines that there can be no absolute criteria or belief systems which are necessary for making any value judgements. So conflicts of interests which earlier led to the emergence of a new system of thought now become a resolution to a party that is at an advantageous position.

Hermeneutics, in the broadest sense, means interpretation. Interpretation of actions of the social participants lends a meaning to life. Hermeneutics was initiated and understood by the Greeks, who are supposed to have been the forerunners in this ideology. To the Greeks it was the deciphering of the divine messages. In the attempt to decode the divine messages one gets into the task of self questioning. This helps us understand the truth about oneself and the world one lives in for the sake of wisdom. Hermeneutics in Greek mythology is related with the Greek God Hermes, who is the messenger of the Gods and is considered as the interpreter of the divine tidings. This phenomenon suggests that interpretation also has in itself the act of mediation to decipher unclear messages.

So understanding of the message also involves proper dissemination of the same. Hermeneutics is the process of understanding and letting the world understand this existential import. In the later years hermeneutics came to refer to interpretation of *The Bible*. As *The Bible* is considered as a great book of life, hermeneutics acquires an extended meaning of interpretation and understanding of the basic principles of life and truth as expressed in the Great Book. Some of the names associated with modern day hermeneutics are Friedrich Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. According to Schleiermacher, hermeneutics can be applied beyond written literature. It is concerned with understanding of linguistic communication and not applying or translating it. Schleiermacher also felt that the historical context of the text is important for its understanding. He also felt that understanding is not a matter of fact; it must be willed and sought after. It is putting together words, signs and events into a meaningful whole. When this happens they become a part of the perception of the reader or participant in this understanding and this understanding is expressed in any form. This is achieved when the universal condition of human understanding is related to the nature of consciousness, the nature of truth and the importance of language.

As it is universally accepted, language is a tool to express ideas and words and expression expressed through the words become conveyors of meaning. According to Schleiermacher, this universe is a whole which encompasses units of knowledge. This necessitates a proper understanding of the individual units of knowledge to reach the proper understanding of the whole. This is an ontological approach to deciphering reality. Schleiermacher is one of the first thinkers who approached understanding of reality in a systematic manner. For him the world and the Spirit constitutes the whole world. A meaningful

interconnection and interdependence is required for a meaningful existence. According to him the human spirit participates in this meaningful conversation with the cosmos which becomes the driving force of our curiosity which leads towards further understanding and discovery of the world and the self. This acknowledgement of interdependence leads to what can be called religiously our “God - consciousness” (Zimmermann 26). Even an atheist accepts that every unit of knowledge, in the scheme of science and religion is interdependent and thus are not deviant.

For Schleiermacher, literary and religious texts are linguistic expressions of a mind “touched by the world-spirit” (Zimmermann 27). This necessitates a leap beyond the logic of the grammar of language towards a meaningful relation of the part and the whole. This becomes a divine intervention which further leads to empathy on the part of the reader towards the author. A mental reconstruction is required to understand the desired meaning of the author.

William Dilthey is of the view that human experience is the basis of knowledge. So interpretation becomes a reconstruction of ideas of the past obtained by empirical methods and are seen as objective realities. He was clear in his position that the methodology of understanding natural sciences definitely differs from that of understanding human sciences. Human sciences which consist of social science, sociology, history, culture share the psycho-social-cultural - historical relevance and cannot be ignored while understanding the wholeness of the universe. Eric S Nelson in his *Introduction: Wilhelm Dilthey in Context*, while examining Dilthey’s idea of human sciences in relation to life, says, experience gained in life and the resulting understanding is deeper in the psychic context than it is evident.

Dilthey also felt the need to understand history, to quote Zimmermann, “Dilthey liked to say that only history can tell us what we are as human beings” (Zimmermann 32). To Dilthey the past experiences lead to the present and the understanding of the future. This concept becomes one of the basics for the hermeneutic loop of Heidegger to decipher the conversation of the literary texts. The knowledge of the historicity of existence is a condition and the extent of self understanding depends on the role that each of us play in the history of our existence. Edmund Husserl is another major contributor to the principle of hermeneutics. He viewed human life as a phenomenon and the task of understanding this phenomenon lies in the proper understanding of the matter which makes up life.

Another outstanding contribution to the precept of hermeneutics is from Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher. According to Heidegger, the meaning of the objects of the world can be obtained not from the mere conception in the mind but is based on the belief, truth and justification which directly relates to the practicality of real life. He opined that hermeneutics is not just a principle of understanding but an analysis of life itself. He reiterated Dilthey’s claim that humans are historical beings in the sense of self interpretation. The meaning of life is determined by the web of relations that holds together the different strands and aspects of life. Taking a scientific and objective stand distances and takes the meaning of life out of the life cycle. To Heidegger the world is not a scientific laboratory where things are viewed and analysed and understood objectively. Instead it is a home where everything is familiar and the quality of life is determined by the way in which things and relationships are viewed which in turn are designed and determined by the culture and tradition. So life becomes an exegetical endeavour. Every accomplishment of life’s tasks depends on understanding its different parts, roles

that humans have to play. Thus it becomes cyclic. This is what Heidegger terms as the hermeneutic circle, understanding of the different parts in order to arrive at a complete whole.

The scheme of Heidegger's Hermeneutic loop starts with understanding life as a personal narrative giving room for questions related to the meaning of events which make up life. The meaning of events is in turn projected through the actions or speech which leads to the engagement of individual incidents to arrive at a meaning. This engagement elicits a feedback, challenging the meaning towards that understanding, triggering a reflection and reinterpretation. This leads to the understanding of the whole, which is Life in its entirety.

Hans- Georg Gadamer another major influence in the theory of hermeneutics whose theory of meaning is enunciated in his *Truth and Method*. To him hermeneutics is not a process for finding the meaning. It is an experience. It is an encounter between the past, what is already familiar, known and the future, what is unknown. This encounter gives a fresh and new insight of matter. For Gadamer this new interpretation happens as the reader becomes the participant of the text or idea by extending the imagination. This participation widens the perspective of life and also aids reaching a cohesive social vision which is essential for a whole life experience.

Hermeneutic principle helps in understanding literature in two ways. Hermeneutics proves that language is not mere conceptual but metaphorical and metaphors are not ornaments to embellish the language but essential in the perception of the world around. Hermeneutic thinking helps in humanising the environment that makes understanding easy. Secondly hermeneutics helps in integrating apparently two different

things that enlarge our perspective. That which is unfamiliar is integrated into the familiar that deepens our understanding. Hermeneutic thinkers emphasise the power of imagination to enhance our vision of life. The ability to see things otherwise, think outside the box helps create a better world around.

Significant contribution of Ricoeur to hermeneutics is that he moved beyond the formalistic hermeneutics to go beyond the word, the sign and relate to other objects and subjects. To him the text is a complex entity and the meaning cannot be arrived at from any single unit which makes up a text. Metaphors according to Ricoeur are not just an embellishing frill but that which redescribe reality. They have a heuristic purpose. In his *The Rule of Metaphor*, he talks of the power of language and how language extends its meaning through metaphors. To him for a text to be understood three things are at work - discourse, tension and mediation. A discourse happens among the speaker, the hearer and the world. Tension is felt when the metaphors take shape and mediation is as the metaphors produce a new meaning.

All these deliberations on how hermeneutics helps in understanding a text converge to the point that the reader is very important in the delineation of meaning. As Wolfgang Iser puts it in his essay "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", the text is more than a text. It becomes a reality only when the reader intervenes and there is mediation between the signified and the reader for the realisation to happen. It is at the meeting point of the text and the reader that the literary work starts to exist. But it is always virtual because the convergence of the reader and the text varies according to the disposition and the temperament of the reader. While considering the different circumstances in which the reader will arrive at the convergence, there is always

the anticipation and the retrospection. The reading experience will alter the original state of the reader, as he can find himself in a new reality arising out of the remnants of the earlier vision. This study tries to explore the avenues of the hermeneutic loop which helps in the comprehension of Coelho's select works which has enlarged the vision of life of the researcher.

Interpretation and understanding with their myriad contours fall back on psychology for further delineation. Psychology addresses the core of Gadamer's experience, Ricoeur's mediation, and Heidegger's relationship between the parts to arrive at a whole. Psychology is the art of not only understanding people but also relating situations for a better coordination between people and society. As it encompasses the study of human thought and behaviour, which is complex, many speciality and application areas have emerged for better understanding of human personality and serves as a therapeutic purpose. Some of the specialised areas are Abnormal, Biological, Clinical, Cognitive, Comparative, Developmental, Forensic, Industrial-Organisational, Personality and Social psychology. These diverse fields help in a better interaction between people and society.

B.F. Skinner, Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, Albert Bandura, Leon Festinger, William James, Ivan Pavlov, Carl Rogers, Erik H. Erikson, and Lev Vygotsky are some of the psychologists whose theories and methods have had a great influence on the systematic use of this branch of science to the benefit of humanity.

Freud's greatest contribution to psychology is his theory on personality and psychoanalysis. The childhood experiences form the basis of personality and this is revealed in the different stages of development of the child. Freud recognises three

fundamental structures in the brain, namely the id, ego and the superego. The personality of a child is framed with respect to its configuration. His psychoanalytic theory, with its focus on individualised sexual identification bears the brunt of criticism. This led to the emphasis on dreams and the defence mechanism that an individual might adopt to protect their biological drive against the societal expectations that are at variance.

B. F. Skinner, an American psychologist and most importantly behaviourist, who propounded his theory on behaviourism. He proved that learning can be enhanced by stimulus -response method and behavioural patterns could be designed by controlled atmosphere and reinforcement which would result in a changed and desired behaviour which he terms as operant conditioning. But Skinner's theory, especially regarding language acquisition, was contested on the basis of Chomsky's principle which states that language acquisition in a child is innate.

Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist's contribution in the scheme is towards child development. He views that as the child grows the intelligence also changes and the cognitive development is not only about acquiring knowledge but the child has to develop a mental construct of the world. This is termed as genetic epistemology.

Albert Bandura is another psychologist whose contribution to psychology is definite. In his social learning theory, the emphasis is on observing, modelling and imitating the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. Along with the classical conditioning and operant conditioning of behavioural learning theory, he also postulates on the mediating process that occurs between stimuli and response and that observational learning from the environment leads to a certain type of behaviour.

Leon Festinger is one of the five oft quoted American social psychologists. His ideas of cognitive dissonance and social comparison theory have made a sure inroad in the understanding of social psychology with respect to stimulus-response conditioning in human behaviour. Cognitive dissonance is the perception of contrary ideas related to society, values, and belief systems. It is a psychological stress caused when ideas are not consistent. He opined that for human beings to lead a healthy life, psychological consistency is very important and when ideas clash individuals try to resolve in their own way.

William James was the most influential figure in psychology during the turn of the nineteenth century. His contribution towards the two main schools of thought in pragmatism and functionalism has laid the foundation for many behavioural theories in psychology. According to his idea of pragmatism, the truth of an idea can never be proved and one has only to accept its usefulness. His theory of functionalism focuses on the impact of the environment on behaviour focusing on the wholeness of an event.

Another notable name in psychological study is the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov. Though a physiologist his discovery of classical conditioning provided a benchmark in behavioural psychology. Classical conditioning is the association of a neutral stimulus with a meaningful stimulus. This is associative learning which helps understand many of the behavioural patterns.

Carl Rogers, another important influencer of psychology, belongs to the humanistic school of thought. According to him, humans have a basic motive, the tendency to self actualize. He opines that even though limited by the environmental constraints, humans have a tendency to develop their embryonic qualities. Next only to

Abraham Maslow, his studies focussed on the healthy growth of the individuals and contributed to the humanistic theory of personality.

Abraham Maslow is one of the most definite influencers in modern psychology. He belongs to the humanistic school of psychology, with its emphasis on the here and now instead of the past for the meaning of any action. His hierarchy of needs has opened up a new vista in the deciphering of human actions and motifs.

Erik H. Erikson, with his finding of eight developmental stages of human personality, was able to explain the psychosocial conflicts which will serve as a turning point leading to the development of essential qualities and building a strong sense of the self and the right ego identity.

Another major influence in psychology, especially in the psychosocial aspect is Lev Vygotsky. His sociocultural theory has become the substructure for much research in the field. He views human development as a social construct. The values, beliefs and approaches towards a solution are gained by collaborative efforts with the other competent members of the society. This social correspondence is cardinal in the exercise of formation of meaning.

All these different dimensions of psychological theories converge at one point that can be termed as synthesis. An individual has to find a synthesis among the different features like cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and physical that make up human experience. The different needs at proper time, if they have to be met for a human being to realise at different stages of development, according to Maslow, there should happen a synthesis. Psychosynthesis is a methodology which is concerned with bringing together the different aspects that make up a whole personality.

While psychoanalysis, as the word suggests, is splitting the whole into its components to understand its nature and function, psychosynthesis goes further, to put everything together and harmoniously synthesises the integral part- the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. Roberto Assagioli, an Italian psychoanalyst founded this principle during the turn of the twentieth century.

Psychosynthesis is a comprehensive approach to self realisation and the development of human potential. Psychosynthesis helps the individual in achieving the creative potential, in living a harmonious life and thereby improving the quality of life. Psychosynthesis is described by Will Parfitt as “psychology with a soul” (13). Psychosynthesis foregrounds the value of intuition, inspiration and creative acuity. It is a process that instils trust in oneself by recognising not only the individual’s journey towards holistic development but other groups such as family, friends and society of which the individual is a part of. Thus it becomes transpersonal with the aim of honouring and utilising the wishes of a community.

In order to harness the individual’s potential by integration of the various parts, it becomes imperative to recognise the ‘I’, the centre or the ‘self’. It is around this ‘I’ that the synthesis takes place. As Parfit puts it, “The more the sense of this ‘I’ is realised, and the more contact is made with it, the more we can realise our deeper connection with the transpersonal or spiritual realms” (16). When the different parts are unified, there is a release of positive energy and joy, truth, happiness and unity. Psychosynthesis facilitates this release and brings to play this energy. The exercise of psychosynthesis consists of the analysis of the individual to have a thorough knowledge of the personality followed by focussing on the ways to control and integrate these various parts of the personality. The

principle of psychosynthesis states that, “. . . we are dominated by everything with which we become identified or attached. We can dominate and control everything from which we disidentify or detach ourselves” (Parfitt 17). This detachment and re-identification happens when one is able to connect with the unique self or the centre. This connection can be achieved through psychosynthesis which includes the whole person, which is our personality and identification with the divine Self. This also drives towards transpersonal growth. In this journey towards synthesis, the inner conflicts are addressed and those attitudes which were blocks are resolved and the individual realises the true personality. Thus psychosynthesis is a process of transformation and evolution into a wholesome and a better human being.

If an individual is able to effect a transformation in himself it just does not stop with him. It affects a whole community. This metamorphosis becomes a blessing to humanity. The transformed individual serves the world in a way that is subtle but sure. This disquisition explores the way in which each of the people of the novels taken for study transform and help in the transformation of others who are a part of their lives. Humanistic social work attends to the needs of the participants of any society in a holistic manner. Adhering to Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs, humanistic social work aims at helping individuals to attain the needed self esteem to lead a worthy life. As humanistic social work focuses on the interactions between humans and their environment, this inter-relatedness is viewed from psychosocial, spiritual and physiological perspectives. Humanistic social work is a scion of humanistic psychology.

Humanistic psychology differs from the behaviourist perspective and psychodynamic approach to psychology in its rejection of the deterministic and stimulus-response idea of

the former and the edge of the unconscious and the instinctive forces over human thought and behaviour of the latter. Thus the humanistic approach offers an eclectic range of credible methods in the practice of psychotherapy. Norman Goroff in his *Humanism and Social Work- Paradoxes, Problems and Promises* argues that individual human beings should be seen as a person with inherent dignity and worth and the society should be non-exploitative, cooperative and equalitarian.

The quest of humanistic social work is to establish such a social environment that fosters social justice, equality, and freedom. Humanistic theory focuses on value, meaning and creativity in all human endeavours. It acknowledges the goals that people set to achieve. It respects that humans can have choices and these choices come with responsibility. It also acknowledges the value of self help with the notion that each individual is accountable for his or her happiness. Humanistic approach values relationships with utmost importance.

While a hermeneutic study of the literary works helps to understand the itinerary of the plot structure which places the characters in such positions that they struggle and find their way out, psychosynthesis helps in bringing about a unification and reconciliation of the various attributes and factors which makeup an individual a wholesome being. It is this wholesome being, in harmony with himself, who reaches out to the community to construct a similar change. This becomes the humanistic social work perspective. Thus it is seen in Santiago, in *The Alchemist* he is shaped by the different circumstances he is placed in. His initial and innate drive of wanderlust makes him a shepherd. The carefree life of the shepherd gives him the opportunity to dream. He dreams of a treasure and this leads him to the interpreter of the dreams, an old

woman. She sets him on the course of the journey to the pyramids of Egypt. The King of Salem, Melchizedek teaches him the value of omens and signs. His apprenticeship with the crystal merchant helps not only him but the merchant too thereby offering a meaning to the existence. His journey with the caravan towards the pyramids becomes a selcouth experience. He meets the Alchemist and discovers his soul mate Fatimah. He meets the tribals who are at war. He converses with the Sun, the Moon, the Wind, the elemental forces of Nature. Finally he gets to know that the treasure is under the sycamore tree in his city.

In *The Pilgrimage*, the pilgrim being the author himself undertakes the journey to the cathedral of St. Compostela in Spain to recover the lost sword. The sword is the symbol of power and wisdom. Unless and until the individual understands the meaning of power and acquires the knowledge to use the power wisely the sword cannot be regained. In this adventure, he is guided by the Master, Petrus. The Master is already in possession of the sword and is the right person to guide. The Master guides him through the journey. From the identification of the devil at the start of this odyssey, towards a realisation, in understanding the reason behind every incident like the encounter with the black dog, he teaches him the values of time and patience and faith in miracles along with the different exercises which are necessary to understand this. Each of these incidents becomes a stage in the development of the personality of the pilgrim so that he becomes a full person ready to receive the sword.

In *The Zahir*, the author is in a fix. His wife, who is a war correspondent, is found missing. This leads to speculation over their marriage. His meeting with Mikhail becomes an eye-opener. He understands the real meaning of the favour bank of which everyone is a member and love which is the sustaining force of life. All the incidents like meeting

with an accident, with the beggars in Paris, work towards the needed understanding. They become part of the scheme towards a whole.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, Veronica is a shattered soul seeking unification. When she finds herself in the mental asylum, the Doctor, the nurses, Mari, and Eduard are the different entities which help her in finding herself. *By the River Piedra I sat and Down and Wept* is a beautiful love story of Pilar and her childhood friend, now an aspirant to the seminary. When Pilar receives the message from her childhood friend to go over to Madrid, to meet him, she least realised that it be life changing event. Meeting him, watching him speak to the crowd of the love of God and the miracles that He performed, she wonders if he will marry her. When she finds that he is going to go to the seminary, her dreams seem shattered. But their love wins not over his love towards God but understanding that Love is an all encompassing force that is needed for existence. Here again all the incidents put together give the meaning of life.

The Devil and Miss Prym is a soul disturbing story of the struggle between the good and the evil. Miss Prym has to choose between the gold and committing a murder or making the people of Viscos commit the crime. The incidents built towards the climax are lessons of life, to understand herself and the people around. Finally it is the good nature of man that wins.

In *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, Pilar finds out the deepest calling of her life when she meets her childhood friend, who is the devotee of the feminine aspect of God. He can perform miracles because of his belief and faith. Though 'faith can move mountains' is a cliché, Pilar understands how important it is in everyone's life. Pilar understands what true love is, that will make life meaningful. It is love that makes her

beloved perform miracles. Pilar also understands, to love, one needs courage as love has in it leaving, solitude and sorrow. But it is worth every penny of its price.

Hermeneutics is dealing with the parts to understand the whole. The protagonists of all the stories are put in such an environment that allows them to understand themselves and the world around them. Each of these circumstances is important without which they could not become a whole being. As they find themselves in these locales, they undergo changes in their personalities as a result of the synthesis of various attributes. This synthesis in their psyche helps them to go beyond themselves and reach out to the community. Thus humanistic psychology which recognises feelings and passions in human endeavours comes to play. This research endeavours to study how with the help of each of these ideologies the characters understand life.